

Six techniques for advocating design in your organization

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Are you trying to incorporate a new design process into your organisation and facing challenges? Paul Sherman in this [article](#) talked about how User Experience Practitioners are natural "change agents". We could not agree with him more.

This article discusses some techniques to help overcome challenges incorporating design into your product development process.

Changing a company's product development process is not something we can do alone. The key to our success is in effectively collaborating with people from different perspectives: marketing, sales, development and other business entities in our companies. It can be demoralizing when the speed at which our processes are adapted by our organizations is not what we expect. Many of us shared this frustration at [User Friendly 2006](#) in Hangzhou.

We suggest using these **six techniques** to help you become more strategic in gaining acceptance to your design process.

1. Discover opportunities through building relationships

Your *ethnographic research skills* can help you find ways to relate to your collaborators. Have conversations with peers and teams leads that you collaborate with about their struggles towards their product creation process. Talk to your stakeholders about what is not working in their product development process.

Actively listen to them to help understand:

- What are their **goals** for the company, their teams and the product?
- What **communication breakdowns** do they experience?
- What **concerns** do they have?
- What is the **biggest issue** the organization has with its **product development process**?
- Do peers, leads and stakeholders have the **same goals** or do they **conflict**?
- How do they **interact** with each other?
- In what ways can a **better design process help** them fix their problems?

2. Develop empathy towards organisational personas

User research helps us develop empathy for our users. Once this relationship is created, we become advocates for users and get inspired to create better designs to solve their problems. Identifying **organizational personas** in our design process will help us develop relationships with our **collaborators** on the basis of empathy - allowing us to see problems through their eyes and not just our own.

3. Conceptualize an approach together

Companies, like people, are unique. The same exact design process may not work for all companies. You have to tweak a process to satisfy the needs of your current organization. Since this type of work is usually not one that can be carried out by one person, you will often need to find allies with whom you can throw around ideas and find answers to these questions:

- At **what point** can a **design process** enter to help achieve the goals of your organization?
- How would you design your process to work within the **organizational culture**?
- How would it meet the goals of the various **personas** in your organization?
- **Who** will be interested to talk about these initial ideas?
- How can you **appeal** to them?

4. **Socialize early concepts**

When developing a product's design, we often socialize early concepts with key team leads and stakeholders to **test the water**. This is often done to ensure that when curtain is drawn, there are no bad surprises and everyone applauds the idea *that they have had a say in*. Socialize early concepts and invite people from outside of the design group to refine concepts together on the drawing board with you - is another way to work together collaboratively.

5. **Start small**

Seeing is believing. **People are moved to buy-in to your process if they can see results**. However, not every design project is a good candidate to try out your process on, especially if you don't already have buy-in from key people. Applying your process to **small projects** is often an easier sell. How do you define a small project? It depends on your situation. Perhaps it's a low profile project, one that you can finish quickly, or one that involves a small team. Any one or a combination of these project types may be good candidate to prove how the process will work and what the results could be to your team and stakeholders.

While working on the project, frequently communicating the progress of the project can help others understand its value over time. I have done frequent updates through blogs or weekly meeting in-person on progress and pointing out where design added value. Depending on the communication styles of your work place, you can choose an appropriate way to communicate to stakeholders, allies and skeptics. Starting small has helped me each time I played a role in **helping establish a design process** within a larger organization.

6. **Improve over time**

Frequent communications will help us be quicker at identifying inefficiencies. As champions of the design process, we should invite those discussions in a formal and informal manner. This helps us respond quicker in turning breakdowns into process improvement opportunities. The more communications that allow open discussions about what is and is not working, the easier it will be for collaborators in the team to continually create a work approach that is organic to the organization and the individuals who work within it.

The current organization I work for do a "**retrospective**" after each release of a product and they improve on the process. The design process often starts off with designers themselves as its advocates. Once it becomes accepted as part of the overall software development process, everyone will take ownership and can contribute to the improvements we make over time.

For those who are starting to build a design or user experience capability within an organization and are finding challenges, I hope some of these techniques will help you build the kind of relationships that lead to long term collaboration.

If you have **similar experience to share** on this topic or additional techniques to add to the six, please [contact us](#).