HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN – THE "T" CHARACTER

This post is in a series of commentaries on a class running at Stanford, Winter Quarter 2010 – "Transformative Design" ENGR 231 – [Link]

Real world problems don't fit into neat disciplinary categories. We hear much about the importance of interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary work. (Multidisciplinary implies keeping the disciplinary distinctions we need to bridge?)

Stanford d.school 's mission is to promote design thinking as such a bridging field. And one that involves close attention to the human component in addressing real world problems.

Tom Kelley and Tim Brown have outlined the character types they think are the heart of design thinking [Link]. The kinds of people who contribute to innovative design.

One is the “T” character – able to combine in-depth knowledge of a particular field or method (the vertical in the “T”) with an ability to connect across specialist expertise (the lateral). And they identify design thinking with this creative, human-centered work of connection.

I have described how design thinking is a kind of pragmatism [Link] and this notion of a “T” character intrigues me. I want to sharpen up the idea, but am not sure how. Is it really a character type?