

Meet Tiego Monareng: Empowering startups with design thinking

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Tiego Monareng has been a coach at the Hasso Plattner d-school Afrika since 2019. Alongside leading the d-school's Foundation Programme, he is also coaching a group of Foundation Programme alumni through the creation of their startup, *Xpecting*, a company that aims to deliver ultrasound technology to women in rural areas of the Western Cape.



Tiego Monareng

Transport, a lack of sonographers, and cultural barriers all contribute to the scarcity of maternal care for women in rural areas of the Western Cape. *Xpecting* seeks to alleviate this problem by developing an application that receives images from a wearable, portable ultrasound device that enables easy, remote, real-time virtual consultancies.

Presently, the team of six is prototyping minimal, viable models of their idea. Tiego's been helping them to develop and refine their product by using resources and methods from the Foundation Programme. Included among these are: becoming comfortable with the non-linearity of devising solutions to problems, building confidence by navigating uncertainty as a team and maintaining a sense of curiosity that drives continued exploration. He explains how design thinking has helped to construct a core that can withstand the eventual pressures that come with problem solving.

"Most startups fail, and usually the cause of that is that they're not solving for a real-world problem," Tiego says.

But design thinking's early stages demand that problem-solvers probe deeply into the challenge they wish to resolve and make sure that they are attempting

to meet the real needs of real people.

"We test our assumption around the problem first by going out and speaking to people to find out whether or not they experience the problem the way we see it," Tiego says.

The group's view of the problem is something they discuss in depth during the *Understand Phase* of the design thinking process. Here, team members align their thoughts about the challenge and co-create a joint worldview that ensures everyone has a similar grasp of the task at hand and the tools that it will require.

This phase, and the subsequent stages of observing and problematising, ensures that the team – however diverse it may be – is equipped with a common language that "neutralizes levels of hierarchy and invites joint levels of collaboration," Tiego says.

This is one of the many beauties of using design thinking when building a team.

"You can have someone who is an engineer working with someone in healthcare, and they don't really speak a common language that can really enable them to collaborate. But once they've gone through the design thinking process, we feel that they have enough of a common language with the design thinking tools to communicate and work well with each other."

Coaching the startup has been one of Tiego's highlights during his time at the d-school. He's also enjoyed seeing members

of international, multilateral organisations shift from states of scepticism to moments of sheer joy and creative confidence after experiencing the design thinking process.

“They get really excited! They seem to really care about it – and that feeling is quite cool,” Tiego says.

Tiego’s found that design thinking has changed the fabric of his friend group, too. They tend to argue quite a lot. “But, like, it’s a style. Design thinking hasn’t reduced the argument’s quality – it’s just streamlined it. Very quickly, we try to clarify: What are we debating about right now? Is this a thing that you disagree with? Do we agree with this?”

It’s just like using the *Understand Phase*, Tiego says.

“Now, we’ll always start with a little bit more clarity, because we try to understand the worldview around what we’re speaking about before we go forward.”

And then they can go forward.

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