Life Design
by Frauke Godat

an excerpt from the book

A Transformative Edge
Knowledge, Inspiration and Experiences for Educators of Adults
Life Design

Frauke Godat

Life Design is a Design Thinking (see article on Design Thinking) approach to career orientation and planning.

There are two threads of Life Design that I am aware of. One is a class and the book “Designing Your Life” which originated at Stanford University in the US. The other is a consultancy concept on “The Future of Work” and a book called “Design Your Life” from a startup in Cologne, Germany.

Designing Your Life, Stanford

Teaching at Stanford University, Bill Burnett and Dave Evans have taken the practice of Design Thinking for designing creative solutions to complex problems, and applied it to life planning and job selection. They encourage learners to think like a designer: ask questions, look for allies, make mistakes, build prototypes, and think interdisciplinarily. They empower the learner to become the designer of her or his own life.

Courses and workshops are held in Stanford, Yale, and other universities. There are specific workshop retreats for women’s empowerment.

In a New York Times article, a former student is interviewed:

“Emma Wood, a 25-year-old Stanford graduate and a consultant at McKinsey & Company who took “Designing Your Life” as an undergraduate, said the class released the pressure she felt about the life she would face after graduation.”

Design Your Life, Cologne

The Design Your Life concept was born in a startup in Cologne in Germany. Marius Kursawe and Robert Kötter have their own consultancy and are often confronted with “The Future of Work” when they work with clients.

They host JobCamps. In these intensive one-day workshops, participants develop their personal roadmap with the Life Design tools from their book. They also run training programmes to certify participants as Life Design Coaches.
Learners are encouraged to think and act like designers of their own life. They do not have to be consumers of jobs created by society anymore. Learners are being empowered to turn society’s needs into new job opportunities while they can live their personal passion at the same time. Furthermore, learners are constantly reflecting and rethinking their personal values, attitudes, and needs in the design process.

At Kiel University, I have used both approaches in a career planning seminar which was a prototype in a national government-funded project for teaching and learning innovations (PerLe – Projekt erfolgreiches Lehren und Lernen, project for successful teaching and learning). Students from different faculties took a seminar for one semester.

The encouragement “to think like a designer” from the Stanford approach enables students to use design principles to change their attitude towards life planning. Rather than expecting that the perfect job will be offered to them, they start to create their own jobs, to question society’s expectations towards them, and learn how to build their personal networks according to personal interests and needs. Students engage with these principles through a visualization exercise at the beginning of the semester. A valuable addition to the prototyping phase in a Life Design process is the Job Shadowing tool from the Theory U toolbox.

The exercises in the German book “Design Your Life” are playful and full of surprises for students. The one-day workshops that were part of each seminar always led to high energy and engagement. The book has lots of visuals, pictures and user stories which also motivates me currently to start designing my own next career steps since our university project ends in one year.

References

The book “Designing Your Life” is available in different languages and there is also a workbook: https://designingyour.life/the-book/

Online course (look out for discount periods in the year) and worksheets: https://designingyour.life/resources/

The book “Design Your Life” is currently only available in German. Some video tutorials and worksheets are available online: www.workliferomance.de/design-your-life-buch/design-your-life-buch-videos-downloads/

Like-minded readers from “Design Your Life” can connect and build their network on Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/1205011906177683/
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