

How can we apply AI without 'losing' creative thinking?

An in-depth analysis of how AI is changing design thinking, why speed can compromise quality, and how to retain critical thinking.

Amidst the explosion of AI, particularly in product design and development tools, a subtle but worrying shift is emerging: people are beginning to lose sight of how their thinking is changing.

We can easily recognize this in very everyday ways. Previously, when faced with a design problem, you would spend time contemplating, sketching, and experimenting with ideas. But now, the first reflex is to open an LLM and request a complete design in just a few seconds. The question is no longer 'how much faster is AI?', but rather: are we unconsciously **outsourcing our own thinking** ?

When critical thinking is disregarded

AI has made product creation easier than ever before. But this has led to a reverse consequence: people spend less time thinking for real.

In the business environment, pressure to be "faster" from clients and stakeholders often leads to shortened design processes. However, faster doesn't always mean better. An immature idea should sometimes be discarded from the start, instead of being tested with users simply because testing costs are now so low.

The 'test and learn' process is a good principle, but it's being misinterpreted as mass experimentation—doing as many things as possible and then seeing which ones work. When the cost of generating ideas is almost zero, people tend to generate too many ideas... but think less about the quality of each one.

Significantly, it is precisely these 'neglected' skills—asking the right questions, conducting in-depth analysis, and evaluating from multiple perspectives—that will become scarcer and more valuable than ever in the AI ??era.



Parts of the design process should not be replaced by AI.

Not every stage of the design process should be optimized by AI. The most important part to leave to humans is the **ideation phase – the initial sketching of ideas**. This is when thinking occurs in its most natural state: fast, chaotic, intuitive, and exploratory.

Ideally, this stage would typically take place through group discussions, where ideas are debated, supplemented, and developed. But with remote work or individual projects, the lack of a 'dialogue partner' makes this process more difficult.

The issue isn't about eliminating AI, but about **putting it in its proper role**—not replacing thinking, but supporting it. From this, an interesting idea emerged: building an AI collaborator that can participate in the thinking process in a Socratic dialogue style—that is, asking questions, debating, and challenging ideas.

The key point here is that AI shouldn't be "lenient." It shouldn't just offer "that's a good idea" responses or constantly suggest new options. What's needed is the ability **to filter out weak ideas and highlight strong ones**.

This is also where many current AI tools fall short. Some tools can generate beautiful designs instantly, but lack critical thinking capabilities. They push users straight to the final result, skipping the intermediate thought process—where true value is formed.

When speed becomes a double-edged sword.

AI enables product development at unprecedented speeds. Clearly, without AI, creating a cross-platform application in just a few days would be nearly impossible. But this very speed carries a significant risk: it creates the illusion of progress. A product might look polished in terms of its interface, even with smooth animations, but internally lack a solid foundation of ideas.

In a competitive environment, a quick launch doesn't necessarily provide an advantage if the product solves the wrong problem. Competitors can easily overtake it with a better solution, even if it comes later.

This is a familiar situation in enterprise software development, where products gradually turn into 'feature factories' — constantly adding features without a clear direction, leading to a fragmented and difficult-to-scale experience.

Good thinking always requires a certain degree of 'friction' . AI is trying to eliminate that friction—making things faster, smoother, and easier. But if things become too easy, humans will lose the motivation to think deeply.

In reality, the process of effective thinking is often not smooth. It involves writing down ideas, revising, debating, discarding, and rebuilding. These 'slow' actions are precisely what help the brain form connections and retain information long-term.

Sketching by hand, writing on paper, or using a whiteboard are not just tools, but also part of the cognitive process. These are 'primitive' things, but they play a crucial role in idea formation.

Of course, we shouldn't and can't oppose AI in an extreme way, but instead should clearly define the role of this technology.

AI shouldn't be used to skip steps in a process, but rather to accelerate parts that can be accelerated. Researching users, developing ideas, or evaluating solutions still requires time and investment. AI will become increasingly powerful, but to create good products, we still need people capable of analyzing, evaluating, and connecting ideas. Applying AI sometimes isn't just about working faster, but about **creating more space for deeper thinking** . This is perhaps the most thought-provoking approach in the current context.

AI is changing the way we design products, but the crucial question isn't 'how much faster', but 'are we still thinking the right way'. If we're not careful, speed can become the enemy of quality. But if we know how to leverage it, AI can become a tool to help humans think better—not less.

In a world where everything is increasingly automated, the ability to think deeply, critically, and evaluate will likely become the most important competitive advantage.

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