

ANNA KIRAH

Design Anthropologist and Psychologist

LONDON
SPEAKER
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As a design anthropologist and psychologist, Anna Kirah is an expert in cutting edge qualitative research methods used to understand the articulated and unarticulated needs of people and to connect this understanding to the creation of meaningful, relevant, useful and desirable products, services and organizational change. She believes that focusing on meaning instead of technology better equips industry for the transformations occurring, including digital transformations. Technologies are not solutions, they are enablers to the needs people have to solve the challenges they have in their day to day lives. She advocates finding a balance between technology and humanity and she does this by having a focus on system design and transformation.

Topics

- Digital
- Future
- Strategy
- Women

Anna Kirah's experience working for Boeing and for Microsoft has given her global recognition for her work in trends related to technology, digital transformation, strategy and change management in the age of turbulence. She has an uncanny ability to zoom in and out and put perspective into challenges organizations are facing in an ever changing world.

She began her career as a Design Anthropologist in the 90s when she was hired at Boeing, responsible for both quantitative and qualitative research for the pre-concept work for Boeing's 787 "Dreamliner". It was here she was able to test out her methods with pilots, passengers and crew onboard long haul flights. A typical day was to board a long haul flight and observe and talk with her informants. She became an expert on passenger experience both at airports and in the air. She noted that transition time was a specifically interesting area to focus on in order to find gaps in current designs of services.

Kirah was headhunted to Microsoft in 1999 and was the first anthropologist in a company that was then over 70,000 employees. She was the Chief Design Anthropologist for Windows, MSN, Windows Live, mobile services, embedded software solutions and digital media. She was responsible for the development and implementation of REAL PEOPLE, REAL DATA, a global initiative built on ethnographic methods which brought user involvement to the forefront of technology design and development. Real People Real Data was the first people-centered design effort where services and products were actually made together with the end users who Kirah emphatically calls people. Since this time, service design, design thinking and design anthropology have exploded as useful methods and tools in designing for change.

At Microsoft, Anna Kirah studied life stages around the world: from ghettos in South Africa and Brazil to the most developed homes in Korea, Dubai, Japan and Europe. Her work become so desired that Microsoft loaned her out as an advisor to numerous global companies including: L'Oreal, Ford Motors, Proctor & Gamble.

In 2004, she was awarded Contributor of the Year at Microsoft for her strategic work which contributed to the development of both Windows XP and MSN (later

Windows Live) in a complex system which involved people from all over the world, collaboration with Microsoft's subsidiaries and other key stakeholders. Moreover, in 2010, she was named World Wide Community Subject Matter Expert for User Experience.

Kirah has had more career hats on than many as she has lead global initiatives in both the public and private sector in many different countries, she has designed and led a radical innovation school for top leaders that was written about in Business Week, she has advised governments and CEOs around the world.

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