In a world connected by smartphones, GPS and social media, we have come to expect businesses, hospitals and government to deliver personalized experiences to us on any device in real time. And while we still go to the store to buy groceries or get on a plane to travel from Point A to Point B, the way we consume goods and services is fundamentally changing, which also means the way companies design and build these experiences must evolve to keep pace.

Two approaches to help are Design Thinking and agile development, but the principles they are based on can be a great asset to anyone trying to solve a problem or find better ways of getting work done.

Design Thinking is a method for practical and creative problem solving that evolved from fields as varied as engineering, architecture and business. At its core, Design Thinking focuses on understanding people's needs and creatively discovering the best solution to meet those needs. Its core concepts are understand, explore, prototype and evaluate.

Agile is a group of software development methods that emerged to quickly, iteratively and collaboratively build better business solutions. Its core concepts are iterative
development, risk management and transparency.

Based on work with thousands of our clients, IBM is expanding upon traditional Design Thinking. We call this IBM Design Thinking, and it aims particularly at meeting the complex needs of large scale enterprises without sacrificing the personal focus of Design Thinking.

To get a better idea of how these new ways of working, IBM Design Thinking and agile come to life. Let's take a look at how a company benefits from using these approaches and expanding their business.

Green Genes Nursery is a successful garden design and supply store based out of the State of Vermont in the United States. They've had such explosive growth over the past two years that they've been able to open three additional stores. They launched their Web experience about a year ago, but while their in-store sales continue to grow, their website sales haven't met expectations.

Gene, the founder and owner, uses IBM Design Thinking and knows that he needs to start with the end user. What exactly are the reasons their needs are not being met? First, he needs to find out who his real users are, what they think, how they feel, what they see, hear, say and do. Not satisfied with merely coming up with potential issues
internally, the business design and engineering team members collaborate and decide to find people that have a shared interest in gardening and are familiar with the products.

After their initial search, the team narrows their focus to a candidate that meets a wide variety of helpful criteria, Jane. Jane agrees to an ongoing relationship to provide priceless insights as the business grows. As the team begins to work with Jane, they gain insights they otherwise would have missed.

This research is crucial in making improvements for their users. For example, they find that Jane, despite being interested in new plants, doesn't know where to begin. She likes the way many plants look online, but she doesn't know how to grow and take care for them. At the store, a customer can always ask an expert, but visitors to the website like Jane have no simple way to get help.

Armed with this new information, the team regroups with a larger team to plan next steps for refining the challenge, or hill statement. They agree the site fails to deliver personalized how-to guidance at any point in the online experience.

To articulate a clear outcome statement, the team generates as many ideas as they can: help chat, a planting guide tool,
the ability to submit photos and questions. Gradually they weed out unrealistic and expected ideas that lack a wow factor. Then, and only then, they start to determine how they will build a solution with new features like responsive recommendations to expert videos based on what content a user is viewing.

They begin with sketches, then move to more formal designs to better hone in on the real value their users need. The team leader engages a larger cross functional team that can deliver a working model of the idea. The working model will be reviewed with the larger team and tested with end users.

As the team is developing the prototype, they refine the idea further to offer Jane the ability to archive favorite video materials. They take the working prototype back to the larger team and to the end user to test its effectiveness and get feedback.

The team will iteratively refine the product at each step of the way to make it suited to the user and more seamlessly integrated with the existing website. Finally, the team deploys the new interactive gardening guidance tool, which is closely monitored to ensure it can undergo continuous upgrades based on insights from usage metrics and new customer needs.
By using IBM Design Thinking and agile, Green Genes Nursery is able to define and solve their client challenge by putting the end user first. By applying agile development methods, they're able to deliver new functionality using an iterative approach that was transparent and minimized risk.

But the underlying principles of agile and IBM Design Thinking have the potential for more far reaching applications for all of us, whether we are developers, event managers, client facing IBMers or simply collaborating on projects across global teams. If you are trying to improve a process, beginning with the end user will help you focus on improvements that provide the most value.

If you are trying to make progress quickly on a project, establish the most critical features to focus on first, iterate quickly and share progress regularly across the team and with end users. As the marketplace changes, we need to evolve faster than ever. It's how we keep reinventing ourselves, every day.

[END OF SEGMENT]