Driving renewal, Hosted by Satu Rekonen

Episode 8: Being heard, hearing back – Guest Pia Hannukainen, OP Group

Satu: Welcome to the Driving Renewal podcast. This is a podcast series from Aalto University's Department of Industrial Engineering and Management, where I discuss organizational renewal with various experts. My goal is to understand what renewal looks like in different work environments, what it means in practice, and what it requires from us as people. I am Satu Rekonen, a university lecturer.

In this episode, my guest is Pia Hannukainen, Head of Customer Experience at OP Financial Group. At OP, she leads the development of customer experience across digital channels. Pia has over 15 years of experience in design thinking — as a researcher, designer, educator, and consultant. At OP, she's held multiple roles: she founded the Customer Insight unit, and served as Head of Design, leading Finland's largest internal design community.

She's also a part-time professor of practice in design at Aalto University. Pia has published a lot of international academic research on design and innovation, and she has a doctorate in technology from Aalto University, where she focused on product development.

OP has gone through a big shift — from being a tech-driven company that didn't really use design much, to one where design is now a key part of both decision-making and development work.

In this episode, we'll talk through that change with Pia. We'll look at questions like: How did OP grow its ability to use design more widely and deeply? What role have designers played in that? What kinds of influencing skills are needed to build new ways of working? And what are the most important skills for people driving change in organizations?

Pia Hannukainen, welcome to the podcast.

Pia: Thank you!

Satu: Let's start with the basics. What's the role of design at OP right now? How does it show up in the day-to-day work?

Pia: Well, we probably have the biggest design community in Finland — about 130 designers. So it's a pretty big operation. Around 60% are in-house, and 40% are external, but we all work as one community. We work across all areas of the business and on lots of different levels.

We have four different designer roles: service designers, product designers, content designers, and strategic designers. And the work we do covers a lot — we design products and services, but also business concepts, service processes, even visions and strategies.

Satu: So design plays a pretty broad role at OP these days. Let's rewind a bit to when you first joined OP, back at the end of 2015. What kind of organization did you walk into, and what was your role at the time?

Pia: Yeah, that was already over nine years ago — hard to believe! Back then, design didn't really have the kind of role it has today at OP. I was hired into the strategy unit as a head of research, and I was placed in a market intelligence team. My job was to lead the research portfolio — which, as it turned out, was actually just a market research portfolio.

So we were doing these big quantitative studies every year and those were mostly used by top management. And while there's definitely value in that, it wasn't the kind of research that helps with hands-on product or service development.

Since my own background is in product development and design, I could already sense that there was some interest in design at OP. There were a few designers here and there. So my first question was basically: how is this research we're doing actually being used? And more importantly, where do the people building products and services — designers, developers, whoever — get their customer insights from? Because it clearly wasn't from our research.

So looking back, that's kind of where our design journey was at the time — just getting started.

Satu: You've talked a few times now about both design and customer insight. Can you explain what you mean by those terms, and how they're connected?

Pia: Sure. When I say "customer insight," I mean any kind of understanding we can get about our customers or users. And there are tons of ways to gather that — for example, those big surveys are one way, and most people are familiar

with that approach. But surveys only let you ask about things you already know to ask — they only capture *recognized* patterns.

Then there are all kinds of qualitative methods we use to build customer insight. Designers often themselves for example run validation sessions, interview users, test things with customers, or use co-design methods. So really, there's a whole mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

I'd also include customer experience measurement as part of that mix. And I'd throw in data analysis too — like digging into behavioral data from our own systems to see how customers actually use our services and what kinds of customers we have. So yeah, I'd say it's a pretty wide toolbox — all kinds of methods that help us understand people better.

So yeah, I was honestly a bit disappointed. Coming in as "head of research," I expected research to mean a lot of different things — but in reality, it was just market research. And the kind that's mainly used to support top-level decision-making. For me, with a background in product development and design, research had always meant something broader. And if you're a designer, you need to understand who you're designing for. You have to know your customer — that's the foundation of everything.

And as I looked around, I realized: we're a big company, we're starting to grow our design team, we're building products and services across the board — and yet in every project, the team has to start gathering customer insight from scratch. Every time. There was no shared base, no library of insight that people could tap into. So I started asking myself: if this research portfolio I'm leading isn't providing what designers and product teams need, then where are they getting that understanding? That was the moment I saw the gap. And once I saw it, I started thinking how do we actually fix this?

Satu: And over time, you actually managed to build a Customer Insight team. But how did that happen? Like, how do you go from spotting a gap to actually getting support and resources?

Pia: Yeah, well — honestly, it was a full-on lobbying project. Once I saw the gap — that we were growing our number of designers, building more digital services, and yet still didn't have a systematic way of producing customer insight — I realized something had to change. At that point, OP was already pretty good at building digital services, apps, and interfaces. But if you want those projects to move faster, you need to feed them with insight — and not have every team start from scratch. So I started building a business case.

Just saying “Hey, wouldn’t it be nice if we had more insight?” wasn’t enough. I already had a vision in my head of what a Customer Insight team could look like — a multidisciplinary team of people with different backgrounds, who could support projects across the organization.

So I spent over a year lobbying internally. I looked at past projects and calculated how much time was spent gathering customer understanding — often 6 weeks or more at the start of each new initiative. I worked out how much time and money we could save if we already had that insight “in the fridge,” so to speak — ready to go. Otherwise, it’s like each team has to grow their own ingredients before they can even start cooking. So the business case was pretty clear: doing this centrally would be faster, cheaper, and better.

I also talked to people on both sides — those who would *use* the insights, and those who could help *support* it from a strategic level. It became obvious that the benefits wouldn’t just help designers and product teams, but also top leadership. They’d get a much richer understanding of customer behavior and trends — beyond what traditional market research portfolio could offer.

But yeah, I really did have to put together a proper business case. And once I started crunching the numbers, it was clear — we could save both time and money if we approached this in a more systematic way. One of the biggest realizations was that in a large organization like OP, each business unit — even each sub-unit — was doing their own customer research separately. In the worst cases, people were literally just Googling a research agency and buying a one-off study, which would only be used for that one project and then forgotten. Nothing was being built up or shared — the learnings didn’t accumulate. So it was easy to show the cost savings: it didn’t make sense for everyone to be buying separate research here and there.

And then there’s the fact that even when you *buy* research, you still need to understand it — you need to know how to interpret it and use it. That’s another reason it made sense to have a proper Customer Insight team in-house, with people who really know what they’re doing — experts in qualitative and quantitative research, design, and data analytics.

So yeah, putting the team together took a lot of communication — you needed to be able to sell the idea and get people on board. And looking back, it feels like a real win that we managed to get it done without any major reorganization happening at the time. It was just us pushing it forward based on the clear need and clear value. But it did take a lot of work.

Satu: For sure. A lot of our guests have really emphasized how important communication skills are when you're driving change — and it definitely sounds like that's been a key part of your journey too: talking to different people and helping them understand the value of what you were doing.

Pia: Yeah, absolutely. And I know I've mentioned the business case a few times already — but at the end of the day, every employee gets "bought" with money, right? You need to show where the efficiency gains are, or how you're saving costs, or what the financial value of the change actually is. Of course, that's not the only kind of value that matters — but as long as we're working with limited resources, you *do* have to be able to make that case in some concrete way.

Satu: Right, and I'm sure that kind of concrete case really helps decision-making. So once you'd made the case and gotten buy-in — did you then get the green light to actually build your own team and start hiring? How did things move forward from there?

Pia: So what actually happened was that in our Market Intelligence team, we had a mix of people — economists, market analysts, and then two of us who were more focused on research. At the same time, I'd already started to pull some of the customer experience measurement work into our team. That work had been really scattered across the company and mostly handled by different external partners, so I had managed to centralize some of that already. Then things progressed to a point where the team basically split in two. The people more focused on customer insight stayed with me, and I got permission to grow that side — to increase the headcount and build out the team.

And we ended up with a really great, diverse group of people. We had a social psychologist, experts in both qualitative and quantitative research, some with design backgrounds, some with a technical background — it was a real mix. A bit of everything. I've sometimes described leading that team like conducting a chamber orchestra. I could play some of the instruments myself, but definitely not all. I'd jump in and play now and then, but my main job was to lead the orchestra. And that's kind of how it worked.

And the best part? That team is still going today. We got it off the ground around 2016 or 2017, and now it's on its third team lead. I ran it for a couple of years before moving into a different role, and some of the original team members are still there. Of course, lots has changed — some people have moved on, new ones have joined — but the team itself has survived all the

changes over the years. So yeah, it's been really cool to see something you built still going strong after all this time.

Satu: And it's clear that this wasn't just about meeting a short-term need — the team's been delivering ongoing value ever since.

Pia: Yeah, of course the team's structure and roles have shifted a bit over time — depending on what kind of expertise was needed at different moments. And when someone left, we didn't always replace them with the exact same profile. Sometimes we brought in someone with skills that were a better fit for where we were at that time.

But it's still a very multidisciplinary group. And the fact that it's still called the Customer Insight team — that it's kept the same name — honestly, it kind of feels like watching your own kid grow up over the years.

Satu: Definitely. So once customer insight was centralized into your team after 2015, how did that change the way development projects got started? And was there a learning curve in adopting that new way of working?

Pia: Yeah, so around that same time, OP's overall design maturity had started to grow. We were hiring more designers, and design was beginning to be more structured within the organization. So a lot of what we had to figure out was: how does the Customer Insight team actually work with designers — especially with all the different types of design roles we had? We had to build those ways of working together. Like, how do designers get the most value out of the CI team? That was something we worked on a lot.

I think that was the most important thing and then realizing that an external team, like Customer Insight, can't just spoon-feed the "perfect" understanding to someone. That's not how it works. Insight has to be created together. So we were always involved in projects in some way. The CI team couldn't go deep into every single project — that just wouldn't have been realistic — but we worked out how the connection should work.

Another big part was helping designers grow their own customer insight skills. Some designers were already really strong in qualitative research, but many needed support in understanding and interpreting quantitative data. So we had this two-way collaboration where we supported each other and grew capabilities together.

Satu: Pia, you mentioned the term *design maturity* earlier — could you explain what you mean by that?

Pia: Sure. So, design maturity basically describes how well an organization is able to use design, both widely and deeply. It's not a term I made up — it's actually a well-established concept, and there are several models that explain it.

Most of these models are structured like ladders or stages. On the lower levels, design isn't really used at all, or it's only used in a very limited way. Then as you move up, the organization gets better at using design strategically and integrating it across the business. Probably the most well-known version is the Design Ladder from the Danish Design Centre. It has four steps. Step one is where design isn't really present at all. A company might be developing products or services, but there are no designers involved — and design isn't even seen as something valuable.

Step two is where design is seen more like a finishing touch. At its worst, it's just about "making things look nice" — and designers sometimes say that it's about rounding the corners. At best, at this level, design might mean someone doing user interface design — but even then, designers aren't involved in defining the problem or exploring different solutions. They come in at the end, once decisions have already been made. So it's not about understanding the customer's needs from the start — it's more about polishing something that's already been decided.

Then on step three, design is seen as a process. It's no longer just the end result — it becomes a way of working, a mindset, that is integrated from the very beginning of product or service development. At this level, designers are part of the team the whole way through. They're helping shape the solution right from the start. The user's perspective is built in from day one and carried through the whole process. You use design methods not just to decide *how* to build something — but also *what problem* you're solving in the first place, and *why* it matters. So design helps define the challenge, explore different directions, and then shape the actual solution.

And then the fourth and highest level is called *design as strategy*. At that point, design has moved to a much more strategic altitude. It's not just about improving products or services — it's about reshaping the business itself. Design can be used to rethink existing business models or to identify entirely new opportunities. You're asking big questions, like: *What game are we actually playing?* and *Where should we be playing it?*

At this top level, design often includes vision work — shaping the company's future direction. Design gets tied directly to the company's vision, its business model, and even its role in different networks or ecosystems. That's really what design maturity is about — how design is used in the organization. And as you

can probably tell from these four stages, the role of design changes a lot depending on the level. Which also means you need different types of designers.

Satu: Well tell us a bit about OP's own design journey. Since you've been there, how has the organization's ability to use design — that design maturity — evolved? What do you think have been the biggest milestones along the way?

Pia: I joined OP in 2015, but the journey actually started before I got there. Looking back, I think the real starting point for growing OP's design maturity was linked to what was happening at Nokia. Back in the early 2010s, Nokia had a major R&D center in Oulu, which got shut down. That meant a lot of digital talent suddenly became available. OP's leadership saw an opportunity — they realized that digital services, especially mobile, were about to take off in a big way, and they wanted to invest in that. So OP opened a development unit in Oulu and hired a bunch of those former Nokia people. At the time, I don't think the goal was to bring in designers — they were hiring digital developers and tech experts.

But some of those people just happened to be designers, or had worked closely with design. So design kind of came in as a "bonus," like inside a Trojan horse. A lot of those early designers didn't even have "designer" in their title — maybe they were called user researchers or concept managers. UX designer might've been the closest label at the time. But that's how design first entered the building. When I joined in late 2015, designers were scattered around the organization. Not everyone had a formal design title, but the mindset was starting to catch on. People were beginning to realize that maybe this was something worth investing in. So yeah, when I joined in 2015, there were already designers sprinkled around the organization — not always with the title "designer," but people who were working in a design-like way. They'd sort of taken root here and there. And earlier that same year — just before I came on board — some people inside the company had started to realize: "Hey, this is actually a capability we should invest in." There was a growing awareness that building up internal design expertise might really be worth it. So they ran the numbers, made the case to leadership, and eventually got the green light to go ahead with a bigger recruitment push.

At that point, OP had already been working quite a bit with external design agencies. But people had started to realize that if we kept relying on outside firms, then all the know-how — all the expertise — would stay with them. And especially when you're trying to build something really interesting or something that could give you a competitive edge, that work really needs to happen in-house. That kind of knowledge and capability has to live inside the company.

So yeah, right at the end of 2015, they got approval to hire nine new designers all at once. I think it was four business designers, four service designers, and one UX design lead. And that's the moment I walked into — things were just starting to take off. It was the beginning of real growth, and also the first time there was any kind of centralized design function. These nine new hires were all brought in as part of that.

That was the setup back then. And once those nine joined, it kind of became the seed for what you could call an internal design studio. That's when design started being done more visibly — or at least, we really tried to make it visible — not just on the surface level like UI design, or isolated service design efforts, but more broadly.

Those business designers, in particular, landed in places where some business units were just starting to realize: "Hey, maybe design can be useful for more than just building a product or designing a service."

Satu: Research has shown that adopting design thinking or a human-centered approach doesn't always go smoothly in organizations — especially when it clashes with established ways of working. So I'm curious: did OP run into any cultural challenges when you started pushing design and customer-centricity forward? And what do you think needs to be in place to really make those ideas take root in an organization?

Pia: Customer-centricity and design thinking really go hand in hand, but getting them embedded into an organization takes consistent effort. You have to *constantly* show the value — not just talk about it. You need to prove that design isn't a cost — it's actually a way to *reduce* costs.

It's just like I explained earlier when we built the case for better customer insight: it all came down to showing the business benefits. And honestly, a lot of internal selling has been required to get design accepted and understood. We had to show — over and over — that having a designer involved in a project actually *adds* value.

One way we did that was through metrics. Business leaders understand numbers and money, so for example, we used a metric called "feature lead time" — basically, how long it takes to get a feature from idea to delivery. It's a pretty standard way to track development efficiency. And we were able to show that when designers were involved in a project, the lead time was shorter. That kind of clear cause-and-effect is a great way to demonstrate that design really does make development more effective. We also measured internal stuff — like how satisfied other team members were with the designers' work.

And I think it was around 2017 when we first tried to measure our organization's — I think back then we called it *innovation maturity*, which later evolved into *design maturity*. We ran it kind of like an internal HR survey, just to get a sense of where we stood. So yeah, using the right metrics — that's played a surprisingly big role in making the value of design visible inside the organization.

Then of course sharing *success stories* has also been really powerful. Whenever we had a project where design clearly made a difference — like if something sold better, or even just business leadership saying "this was great" — we made sure people heard about it.

Because let's be honest: if one business unit sees that the team next door got great results by bringing in designers, they're going to start thinking, *Hey, maybe I want some designers in my project too.* Those kinds of real examples — that's where a lot of the momentum comes from.

Satu: So again, it really comes down to making the benefits concrete.

Pia: Yes — and I have to say, this has also been a cultural journey. A big one. We've often talked about how, as you move up the levels of design maturity, it's not just about hiring more designers. That's not enough. At some point, design has to become something that belongs to *everyone*, not just the designers.

And especially, it needs to start belonging to the business leaders. The goal is to grow a culture where *anyone* — not just designers — can understand and apply design methods in some way. Over the years, we've organized a lot of internal events — and they've evolved quite a bit. Before COVID, we used to hold *Design Days* a couple of times a year. It was an in-person, internal event — usually a half-day — and we invited around 100 to 120 OP employees from all kinds of roles, regardless of title or department.

They became incredibly popular — they'd "sell out" in like eight minutes once registration opened. The demand was huge. And they really helped us. We created these big, inspirational moments where people left feeling excited and energized. The format was usually a mix — short talks, maybe a panel discussion, sometimes an external speaker. But there was always something hands-on too. Everyone got to try out some kind of design method or tool together — so it wasn't just theory, but also practice.

That kind of cultural work made a huge impact. And then, of course, the pandemic hit, and those in-person events had to stop. So we pivoted to

something new — a quarterly webinar called *Customer Experience Afternoon*. In fact, we just had our 16th session last Friday, so it's been running for four years now. It all started when we couldn't do Design Days anymore — and then we realized that hundreds of colleagues from all over the company, from all kinds of roles and levels, wanted to keep coming. They wanted to hear about customer experience and design. And there's real power in that. These webinars have become a space where people can share what's working, learn from each other, and grow together. In a way, it *is* training — but because it's peer-to-peer, with our own colleagues speaking and showing real examples, the cultural impact is much deeper.

Satu: What do you think — how big of a role have the designers themselves played in spreading the message about what design can actually offer to the business? Have they been key messengers in showing its value?

Pia: Well, the role of the designer really depends on where the organization is on its design maturity journey. That makes a big difference. But quite often, the designer ends up being the one who asks the tough questions — or challenges assumptions. And that can sometimes be uncomfortable. Like, if you're in an organization that's still at level two on the Design Ladder — where design is seen mainly as a finishing touch — and a UX designer comes in and asks, "Why are we even building this thing I'm supposed to design a UI for?"... well, that question is way too late. But it's also *exactly* the question that should've been asked at the start.

Questions like: *What problem are we solving? Whose problem is it? Is this even a good solution?* Those are core design questions. And often, it's the designer who ends up raising them — even if the timing isn't ideal. The thing is, when the organization isn't yet ready to hear those questions, it can be personally difficult for the designer.

And yes, those questions often come way too late in the timeline — but if the designer only gets looped in at the end, they haven't had the chance to ask them any earlier. Still, it's part of the job — asking, challenging, pushing back in a constructive way. Like saying, *"Are we sure this is really what we should be doing?"* It's actually not unusual at all for a business leader to come in with an idea like, *"We want this feature because our competitor has it,"* without really asking: is this even working for the competitor? Is it actually solving a real problem? Or is the problem somewhere else entirely — and maybe we should be solving it a different way?

The key is not jumping straight from idea to implementation. You have to pause and ask: *Is this the right problem? Is this idea the best way to solve it? Will this*

solution actually work for the people we're designing for? Designers are often the ones asking those questions at every stage — and that's a big part of the role. But it's not just about questioning. Designers also bring proposals to the table. They say, *"Here's what we could do instead. Here's another way to solve this that might work better."*

Designers also play a huge role as facilitators — helping people from different backgrounds work together and actually see what problem they're trying to solve. Not just talk about it in theory or list bullet points on a PowerPoint slide, but really make it *visible*. Sure, that might involve workshops and collaborative sessions, but more importantly, designers are often the ones who can *visualize* what's going on — whether we're talking about product strategy, new business opportunities, or anything else. When someone can put it into a form people can actually see and understand, it suddenly becomes so much easier to have a real conversation about it.

So that facilitation role is incredibly important — especially in helping non-designers. For example, helping colleagues understand *why* reading customer feedback matters, or what "hearing the customer's voice" really means in practice. Sometimes designers literally bring their colleagues into customer interviews — and that can be a huge eye-opener. Imagine a business leader or a developer hearing, firsthand, a customer say they don't like what we've built or that something doesn't work for them. That kind of moment can be really powerful.

Satu: You mentioned earlier that as design maturity grows, design understanding shouldn't just stay with designers and especially business leaders need to develop that understanding too. So where do you think OP stands right now in that regard? Do you feel like your business leaders really understand design?

Pia: Well, let's put it this way — you don't end up with 130 designers in a company unless there's a strong pull for it. So I'd say we're actually at a fairly mature stage when it comes to design. In recent years, we really haven't had to "sell" the importance of design the way we used to. That kind of internal selling — justifying why design matters — belongs to the lower steps of the maturity ladder. We've moved past that. Of course, different parts of the business are at different levels — some units use design more broadly and deeply than others. But just recently, one of our strategic designers said something that really hit home. They told me, "I never thought I'd see the day when *that* particular business director would ask, unprompted, 'Hey, should we make personas for this?'"

And we honestly gave each other a little pat on the back. Because that moment said a lot — that even someone who used to be pretty skeptical was now *proactively* suggesting a design method. Whether or not personas were actually the right tool in that case is another story — but the point is, they understood the *value* and when it might be useful. And then we hear a business leader remind their own team: "Hey, let's remember — it's the customer who pays our salaries. So what we build has to create value for them." And when you hear that kind of thinking coming from leadership, you know the core principles of design have really started to land.

Satu: Pia, you mentioned earlier that you've been closely involved in OP's design maturity journey since 2015. I'd love to hear your thoughts on how the points of influence change along the way. What kinds of influencing opportunities stand out at different stages of that kind of journey in an organization?

Pia: Back in 2015, when I first joined OP, I'd say we were still around level two on the Design Ladder — and at that stage, having a visible champion in top leadership made a *huge* difference.

At the time, our president had personally had a kind of "service design awakening." He was genuinely enthusiastic about it and constantly repeated two words in just about every speech: *service design* and *customer experience*. And honestly, that made a massive impact. Having the president publicly use that kind of language really helped open doors for us.

But as things progressed, we realized something important — something that only became clear later on. It's *not* enough to have just top management sponsoring these ideas. Real, large-scale change only starts when design begins to belong to *everyone* — when it's part of the everyday language and understanding across the whole organization.

It's not enough for top management to talk about it. What really matters is when your *colleagues* — the people you work with every day — understand what design is, what a designer does, and what value that brings. You want them to see design as helpful, not as something that slows things down with "too many questions."

Once you get past that — once people at *all levels* start to engage with design — that's when real transformation happens. But I'll also say: without that initial support from top leadership, it would've been really hard to even *start* the journey.

Or maybe things would've happened differently — but I'd still say that without support from top leadership, it would've been really hard to get this kind of transformation off the ground. It would've been nearly impossible to start maturing OP as an organization in terms of design. But that said, leadership support *alone* isn't enough. In more recent years, especially as leadership has changed and we haven't had that same vocal support from the top, we started to see something interesting. When that "voice from above" goes quiet, that's when you find out who was genuinely nodding along — and who was just nodding because it felt like the right thing to do. And that's when it really hit us: influence has to happen at *every level*, in every context.

Earlier on, when we were on the lower steps of the maturity ladder, a lot of our time went into engaging with top leadership. But later, the focus shifted much more toward *cultural change*. Because for design to really take root, it can't feel like some mysterious secret craft. Everyone needs to understand it — at least enough to engage meaningfully.

Of course, the goal isn't to turn everyone into a designer — and we definitely don't want to dilute the designer's role. But it *is* really important that everyone understands what design methods are for, when they can be useful, and maybe even how to use some of them themselves. Or at the very least, they should feel comfortable joining in and contributing when design is part of the process. That's why we've now built up quite a broad set of internal training programs. It's become a scalable way to influence the culture. We run online courses and formal learning modules as part of OP's internal skills development portfolio — and design thinking and design methods are now part of that offering.

Satu: Earlier, Pia, you talked about the importance of influencing people. Are there any other key ways of influencing that you've found especially important when driving change in an organization?

Pia: This might sound like an old saying, but I think it still holds true: *you get what you measure.* Companies tend to operate based on goals and metrics.

That's why it's been really important for us to have ways to measure things like customer-centricity — for example, we now track how customer-focused our people are across the organization each year. We ask questions like: how are people working? What kinds of methods are they using? It might feel a bit odd to try to "prove" customer-centricity with numbers — but the truth is, if we can show one business unit that their score has improved, or that they're doing better or worse than another area, it gets attention. And once you start measuring something, people start improving it.

We also tied this to incentives. At one point, we introduced customer experience metrics — like brand-level NPS and touchpoint-level NPS — as part of our reward system. And that alone helped shift people's mindset. Suddenly, customer experience was something that *mattered*. And when something matters, people start paying attention to the roles and skills that support it — including designers.

Of course, getting customer experience recognized and measured at the executive level also took some influencing. We had to make the case to leadership that this was worth tracking — and worth rewarding.

But I think now we're at a place where customer experience shouldn't be seen as something separate anymore. It should be fully integrated into how we lead the business. Because if your customer doesn't see value in what you offer, they won't use it — and the business can't succeed.

I really believe it's important that, in the end, all roles share some common metrics. A business metric is also a customer experience and design metric — because the goal is to create successful business outcomes. So setting clear goals and choosing the right metrics at the right level really matters. And if you can influence those goals and metrics — even just a little — the impact can be surprisingly far-reaching.

That's why the idea of *"you get what you measure"* has real weight. Like I mentioned earlier, when we started tracking feature lead time and could show that involving a designer made that time shorter — that's hard evidence. It's a very practical way to prove that having a designer involved just makes sense. So being able to shape the goals and metrics that guide development work is a powerful way to influence how things get done.

Satu: Pia, before we wrap up, I'd love to hear a bit about your own personal experience as a change-maker at OP. What have been some of the most important moments or turning points for you along the way?

Pia: I think that, personally, the biggest achievement of my OP career has been setting up the Customer Insight function.

First, recognizing that there *was* a gap — seeing it clearly — then being able to build the case for why a CI team was needed, and eventually getting it off the ground and leading that team... that's something I'm really proud of. It's actually quite rare to establish a completely new unit like that without there being some kind of big organizational change or restructuring going on. But in

this case, nothing like that was happening. It was just about seeing the need and building the momentum to make it happen.

And now, years later, that team is still running strong — even though I'm no longer leading it, so that's something I'm really proud of.

Satu: And rightly so — you absolutely should be proud of that. On the flip side, what have been some of the bigger challenges you've faced along the way? And what have you learned from them?

Pia: I think the biggest challenge for me, personally, has been the *slow pace of change*. I'm naturally a bit impatient — and the bigger the organization, the more competing priorities, voices, needs, goals, and forces you're navigating. So even something like setting up the Customer Insight team, which I mentioned earlier — that took about a year of internal lobbying. Now, a year might sound long, but in a big organization, that's actually not a lot of time. Still, for me, that slowness can be hard. Especially when you feel like, *"Here's a better way — why can't we just start doing this now?"*

That's still something I have to work on — learning to accept that not everyone sees the path as clearly or as quickly, and that change doesn't happen just because one person sees the solution. And I've also learned that it's not enough to have a good idea — you have to communicate it in a way that others can connect with. You need to show people *what's in it for them*, and why the change matters *from their point of view*.

Satu: Thinking from OP's perspective — what do you think the organization has learned from this transformation journey? Are there things you feel could be useful or applied in future large-scale changes?

Pia: Well, one thing I've definitely learned is that driving change requires a really broad understanding of *why* the change is useful — and for *whom*.

I know I've used the word *value* a lot in this conversation, but it's because it really matters. Everyone already has their own role, their own responsibilities — most people are fully booked. So when someone new comes in and says, "Hey, let's start doing things differently," you really have to be able to explain *what's in it for them*.

And you have to do that *broadly*. It's not enough for top leadership to get it. It's not enough for just your immediate colleagues to get it. In the end, *everyone*

needs to understand the value. Because making change always involves some level of *cultural change*.

Satu: Pia, just one last question to wrap up — looking back, what do you feel are the most important skills that someone driving organizational change should have? What have you learned along the way about what really matters?

Pia: I sometimes think of it as: *"Can you hear me? I'm listening."* As important as it is to put your own thoughts into words and make them clear — and it really is important — I still think it's even more important to listen. To really hear what's coming from inside the organization, kind of naturally. And also to notice what happens when you put something out there — like, if I toss a stone into the water, what kind of waves come back? Change doesn't happen by pushing things through.

It's more like an exchange — a kind of negotiation or persuasion. You can't push people into it. Threats and bribery don't really work. What *does* work is being able to express your ideas clearly and in a way that *resonates*. You need to speak the language of your audience — help them see the relevance and meaning in what you're saying. If it doesn't feel meaningful to them, they won't care.

And just as important is the ability to *really listen*. Maybe it comes more naturally to designers, but empathy is also crucial — empathy toward people in other roles across the organization. You have to be able to step into someone else's shoes. Whether it's the president, a colleague, or someone on the front lines — if you're trying to influence them, you need to understand their perspective.

Satu: That's a perfect summary to end on. Pia, thank you so much for sharing these valuable lessons and insights from your journey at OP.