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2017-10-03

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http://hdl.handle.net/10945/56060

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Dr. Jeanne Liedtka of the University of Virginia's Darden Graduate School of Business speaks to NPS' Design Thinking community during a visit to campus, Sept. 28. Liedtka focused her discussion on how to implement Design Thinking into the decision making of everyday situations.

"Design thinking is an approach to problem solving that's different than what we normally use in organizations," said Liedtka. "It's a problem solving approach that's really optimized for uncertainty."

Design thinking helps us deeply understand the context of a problem and how human beings are involved in it, so we can create ideas to meet their needs, explained Liedtka. "We then subject those ideas to prototyping and experimentation using the old 'Silicon Valley fail, fast and cheap' [method] so we can manage the inevitable uncertainty of the innovation process."

Design Thinking, no matter what role a person fills within an organization, helps them meet the needs of the people they're trying to serve, Liedtka stressed.

"In today's environment, it almost doesn't matter what kind of organization you work in," she noted. "We've looked at traditional large business corporations, at entrepreneurial start-ups, at hospitals, at schools, the Department of Defense, the Food and Drug Administration. Wherever you look, people today are dealing with complex problems."

That is what makes the methodology so appealing, Liedtke notes, as she believes Design Thinking is a method of innovation that can be used by any organization, and anyone.

"One of my favorite things about Design Thinking is that, so many of us have been trained to think that people in innovation are special, like they are the Steve Jobs of the world," Liedtka said. "What we really know is that each of us has the ability to be an innovator. Some of us may need a little more help than usual, and that's where Design Thinking comes in."