

Email responses

Interview date(Email) : 20/03/2014

Interviewee: RB, Senior Designer in 'P design consultancy

Sorry for the delay! See below:

1. What is the most challenge(or constraints) to carry out 'new product design project' with large companies?

Information exchange - large companies tend to hold information not just internally, but amongst a huge array of contractors and other smaller consultancies. These rarely work together and when a singular project requires all of the information to come together it can take weeks or even months (and £1000's of pounds!) to simply have all of the requirements agreed.

Noted Challenges when working with large companies

Information exchange: information is hardly shared due to uncertainty avoidance of large organization – avoiding risk-taking

- Partnership hardly taking place with contractors and smaller consultancies

Ensuring security- i.e. information exchange- is priority in project

- In agreement process with given requirement for project, time consuming –weeks to months –
- Financial issues: costly process for agreeing with all requirement
- Formalization heavy

2. As an external employee to your client, when you work with global large companies, what is the most important thing to come up with the best product design outcome during design projects?

It's always down to cost at the end of the day; if you can deliver a solution which meets as many of the specification items as possible within the time and cost budgets then clients are generally extremely happy! The extra wow-factor always comes from being more personal with the team - even in a large company - but remaining totally professional at the same time. If you build a relationship then it helps a lot. Otherwise we would just be someone to blame if something goes wrong!

- Importance of personal interaction between human- client and consultant when doing project with large companies
- Personal communication and interaction based on professional knowledge and skills
- Human relationship between professionals mitigate and alleviate conflicts in case of deviations

Often clients (usually the smaller ones) don't actually know what they want until they see it, which results in a very long and inefficient design process. If you meet the brief and they don't like it, they will always claim that 'you didn't understand', rather than admit their brief was misleading or wrong. Nobody wants excuses, clients just want to see the end result with the minimum of input and fuss. Babysitting the clients is a constant process which is usually delegated to a project manager; this can involve teaching them about the design process, or managing expectations for deliverables.

Design process is iterative and messy – ill-defined and fuzzy problem solving process (inefficient and time consuming)

- Clients should be guided and directed for proper design project – smaller clients (little understanding of design process)
- In review of brief, clients less understanding design process often claims what they want to do, rather than guided and directed
- Clients focused on the end result (outcomes) within the given input, intended to mitigate conflicts
- Clients in silo thinking : project managers as a gate keeper(listener & speaker only)
- Design process is iterative collaboration with multiple external stakeholders – e.g. clients and consultancies etc.

Sometimes, large clients are very impressed with the range of solutions shown to them - even if not all of them are feasible (but be warned - this does NOT include showing all designs and sketches which don't work, they often only want to see the solution). For example, going one step above the brief to show a design which may be more expensive but has extra WOW factor may just show them what is possible if they invest more. It shows you have thought about the design spec and pushed it to the limits! And also fully understood their brand.

Organizational issues & Design approaches

- Large clients prefer to see of the range of solutions shown to them: diversifying risks with a diverse product lines: formalization with drafts
 - Little concerned with feasibility of the draft and rather focus on quantity
 - Sometime neglected formal ideation & conceptualization phase – sketch and showing visualisation
 - A solution is rather emphasized rather than process
 - Repeated and iterative process can be ignored due to cost in reviewing brief (time & financial)
 - Wow factors necessarily require iterative process by reviewing project from the front - costly: cost vs. investment
 - Organisational capability & design project in accomplishing design spec - limits of budget/ time frame/ brand(or marketing strategy)

3.. Do you find any difference between the Eastern based clients(e.g. China, Japan, Korea) and the Western-based clients in terms of priorities for design?

- if so, how does it differ between them?

- if so, what makes them different?

- if not, why do you think so?

Eastern clients want to be better than their competitors, and they don't always know how or why. Usually adding features or requirements. Western clients tend to have the same goal but approach it from a 'better design' perspective - not simply adding complexity. It can be very tough to explain to eastern clients (I have worked with Korean and Chinese) why simpler can be better. In their eyes, simpler is lower value.

Western companies will also prioritise a design if it is 'the best option', their hierarchy system in eastern companies can cloud the judgement when internal personnel debate prevents decisions being made so staff can exhibit their power or superiority over others - often meaning worse designs go through or good ones get thrown out.

Feasible ideas with the best design solution are all prioritised by all clients

Eastern clients (Korean & Chinese)

- Concerning about market performance and competitive: Want to be better than their competitors
- Focused on what to be, rather than how it works: Don't always know how or why:
- Add-on and complexities preferred: Usually adding features or requirements
- Simpler can be ridicule & lower value

Organizational culture/value

- Yet, hierarchy system in eastern companies can cloud the judgement in internal personnel debate
- Prevent proper design decisions being made
- Staff can exhibit their power or superiority over others
- In internal debates, ideas are twisted and ignored due to political issues of large organization - often meaning worse designs go through or good ones get thrown out.

Western clients

- Common concerns on market performance: Tend to have the same goal
- How it works better is considered: but approach it from a 'better design' perspective
- Complexity is less preferred (rather simpler): not simply adding complexity.

4. Have you ever seen any differences between Eastern based clients and Western based ones in the way they share/ communicate their ideas/information during design project?

- how about decision making process?

- how about way of communication in documentation/ presentation/ meeting place etc.

Eastern clients will never openly 'brainstorm' in presence of their superiors. In case they are 'wrong'. This can be mitigated by separating them into different rooms to allow them to be creative. Eastern clients will also agree to many things even if they do not mean to do so - this is not very productive and very confusing for us as designers. We require blunt, factual, honest reviews to get the product right! Western clients however can beat around the bush a lot and dance around an answer. Sometimes they will delay a decision or differ it to a superior in case they make a wrong call. This can also be difficult!

Communication in design workshop/ideation etc.

Requiring blunt, factual and honest reviews to get the product right

The Eastern

- Hierarchy in open discussion: Will never openly 'brainstorm' in presence of their superiors.
- Concerned about if something goes wrong to their superiors - In case they are 'wrong'.
- Hierarchical order is concerned in speaking out: in same level - e.g. status- speaking out for new idea is acceptable
- Separating between different level helps to mitigate concerns on hierarchy between them for optimizing creativity
- Group & collective decision making preferred: often individuals' are ignored if majority shows consensus Eastern clients will also agree to many things even if they do not mean to do so -
- Shown unproductive in open discussion - ineffective & ridicule phase of design process for the Eastern

Western clients

- Exploration is preferred but could be messy & ill structured: can beat around the bush a lot and dance around an answer.
- Shown ineffective decision- making: decision to be made is delayed
- Challenges against a superior is accepted, but helpless in decision making process
- Diverse & different ideas to a superior often causes messy
- e.g. Sometimes they will delay a decision or differ it to a superior in case they make a wrong call. This can also be difficult!

5. Do you think if open innovation (technology or marketing) is possible to happen in complicated high-technology and engineered products? (e.g. design projects that you have dealt with medical devices, electronics devices)

- If not, why do you think so?

- If so, why do you think so?

- How about open-platform for those products?

- How do you think about open-design activities for those in organizations? (e.g. design workshop)

I don't understand the question, sorry.

6. When considering about your clients (the Eastern-based and the Western based), how do you think about design-centered or innovative organizational culture?

This is almost not applicable to clients we work for as a consultancy. Companies often outsource design work because they have no in house design teams or they do not have that set of skills to do the job, therefore clients rarely have any design based culture. If they did, they would not need our services and we would not be working with them :)

Organizational configuration and structure and design centric organization

: design as culturalized knowledge ; absorptive organizational capability

Scepticism on clients that outsource design projects

- Genuine (or human centric) design approach is hardly applicable through outsourced design projects
- Absence of or little portion of design group in an organization means lack of knowledge and know- how about design ; lack of prior and accumulative design knowledge and background; design knowledge and skills are not absorptive into an organization
- Little spaces (time/jobs/ human resources etc.) to absorb 'design' skill & culture into internal organization –Asia
- Use of and necessity of outsourced foreign design consultancies imply lack of grown absorptive design culture in internal organizations

Have a read and let me know if you would like more info on any particular area!

Thanks,