THE DESIGN AGENDA

A Guide to Successful Design Management

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Acknowledgements

1 Introduction

"How long will it take our industry to realise that UK Ltd is uncompetitive because its products are uglier, clumsier and less appealing to the buyer than those of our competitors".[1]

Tony Key, Corporate Head of Design, British Telecom, 1993

"Design is a political act. Every time we design a product we are making a statement about the direction the world will move in".[2]

Stefano Marzano, Philips Corporate Design, 1993

In answer to Mr Key's rhetorical question – at least 160 years. During a parliamentary debate in 1832 on the problem of Britain's declining export of textiles, Sir Robert Peel blamed poor designs. In the years following Peel, the design message has been pursued with increasing vigour by designers, enlightened industrialists and the government. When Mrs Thatcher backed the message with hard cash, in the form of grants for design consultancy, it appeared that the case for design had been won.

The 1980s has been described as the "design decade", with various events symbolising design's elevation to a prominent position in our industrial culture. Design consultancies raced each other for a listing on the stock market and expanded into Europe and North America. Sir Terence Conran built up his Storehouse design-led retailing empire and attracted sponsors for a Design Museum overlooking

London's Tower Bridge. The consumer boom created a market for designer goods which were often the subject of critical examination by a rising number of design journalists. The business of corporate identity transformed the once familiar faces of well-established enterprises and utilities, and a new business discipline – design management – found its way into MBA programmes.

Design's rapid ascent as a significant economic and cultural activity made its collapse all the more dramatic. Michael Peters, the foremost consultancy of the new design industry, called in the receivers; Sir Terence Conran lost control of Storehouse and saw Habitat sold to a Swedish company; the Design Museum cut back on its staffing and activities in the face of financial uncertainty; and Wally Olins redesigned British Telecom's corporate identity. The prancing piper adorning public telephone boxes was seen to be playing design's last post. Even the director general of the Design Council described it as a "trivial and irrelevant cliché".[3]

The consumer boom of the late 1980s enabled the design industry to indulge in a superficiality and hype to which it ultimately fell victim with the onset of economic recession. The 1990s poses our society with new problems and new challenges. Design must demonstrate that it remains a vital economic and cultural resource rather than a stylistic fad. To develop Stefano Marzano's point, design must reflect and contribute positively to the changing social values that underlie the future direction of the world in which we live.

Behind design's somewhat tarnished public profile is its reality as a resource of considerable benefit to management:

"Design is the process of seeking to optimize consumer satisfaction and company profitability through the creative use of major design elements (performance, quality, durability, appearance, and cost) in connection with products, environments, information, and corporate identity".[4]

As this definition indicates, design brings together the needs of consumers and the objectives of the firm in creat-

ing products and services which perform appropriately, express a commitment to quality, have positive aesthetic qualities and can be produced efficiently. It is clearly an interdisciplinary activity of some complexity.

This complexity requires that the design process is effectively managed. Like any other corporate activity, design requires monitoring and control mechanisms. Standards and policies are necessary to ensure that design is consistent and maintains a recognised degree of quality. Effective management structures are needed to ensure that design meets company objectives and integrates appropriately with other corporate activities. Overall, a strategic approach to design at board level elevates design to an innovative process with a long-term horizon.

Design management "is the application of the process of management to the processes of innovation and design".[5] There is a considerable body of research which examines the dimensions and efficacy of design management. This research has shown that effective design management, although not a general panacea for industry, is a significant contributor to success, deserving a place on the corporate agenda. Companies large and small, both manufacturing and service-based, all need a *Design Agenda*.

However, a crucial argument developed in this book is that design, in its interaction between industry and society, provides a means for organisations not only to accrue profits but also to manifest the social responsibilities increasingly demanded by the public. It must therefore be viewed from a broad perspective in order to appreciate its social, cultural, technological and commercial dimensions.

Background to the Design Agenda

This introduction to design management arises from our teaching and research, both jointly and independently, over several years. At the Universities of Salford and Staffordshire we have taught a range of design students ranging from fashion and graphics to glass and industrial design, and more particularly have developed undergradu-

ate and postgraduate programmes on design management, which have been geared to both design and business students. We have also been involved in design awareness training for managers in industry. Through this work we identified a need for an introductory text that wove together theory and practice, and a guide to the growing literature and other sources of information in the field. *The Design Agenda* aims to meet this need.

Perhaps this book also has a hidden agenda – the commitment of its authors. Our writing and work is rooted in the belief that rekindling a passion for things – things that work, things that communicate, things that evoke meaning and emotion, things that solve urgent problems – is essential in both generating wealth and improving the quality of life. The Japanese clothing designer Issey Miyake described how "we dreamed between two worlds". As a description of what designers do, Miyake's phrase has much to its credit. Design lies between the worlds of culture and commerce, between passion and profit. Design is indeed a passion for things, offering methods that enable them to come into being. It follows that design should also aspire to a passion for the people who use these things, for their quality of life and their aspirations: a passion for betterment. The management of design is about fostering that passion and linking it to the fulfilment of corporate goals and profitability. *The Design Agenda* explains why it is necessary and how it can be done. More so than other books on design management, *The Design Agenda* considers some of the cultural dimensions that are essential to an understanding of design on the part of those who manage it.

This book distils and synthesises our perspectives and arguments on design management, which derive from two different starting points in the field. Rachel Cooper was educated as a graphic designer. Through the practice of design she developed research activities on its management, which currently co-exist with teaching on marketing and design courses. Mike Press was formerly a research consultant for industry and local government on economic development and innovation, whose interests developed towards the role of design in these issues. With backgrounds

and interests that span a range of practices, the authors' intentions were to exploit this diversity in a multidisciplinary introduction to design management.

Using *The Design Agenda*

This book is an introductory text designed for students studying design management at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, together with practising managers who wish to develop an interest in the field. It is not a "how to" book but a "what you need to think about before you do and where to get more detailed information about it" book. In detailing the relationship between design and management it aims to make business students and managers more design aware, and design students more business aware. It is an agenda of issues and possibilities that through further study and the practice of design management will lead to an agenda of action.

The Design Agenda combines contextual analysis, reference to research findings and other literature, relevant exemplars and summaries of practical methods and techniques that enable design to be managed effectively. The book falls into two parts: Chapters 2, 3 and 4 provide a theoretical discussion of design and its influences, while Chapters 5, 6 and 7 look at the practical issues of design and the organisation. Although the book is very much a joint effort, the overall responsibility for the first part was taken by Mike Press and that for the second part by Rachel Cooper. Each of the six main chapters is structured to enable a rapid grasp of the issues covered, provide contemporary illustration of its arguments and promote further study. Chapters start with a graphic "map" of their content and themes, and end with a summary of conclusions and implications.

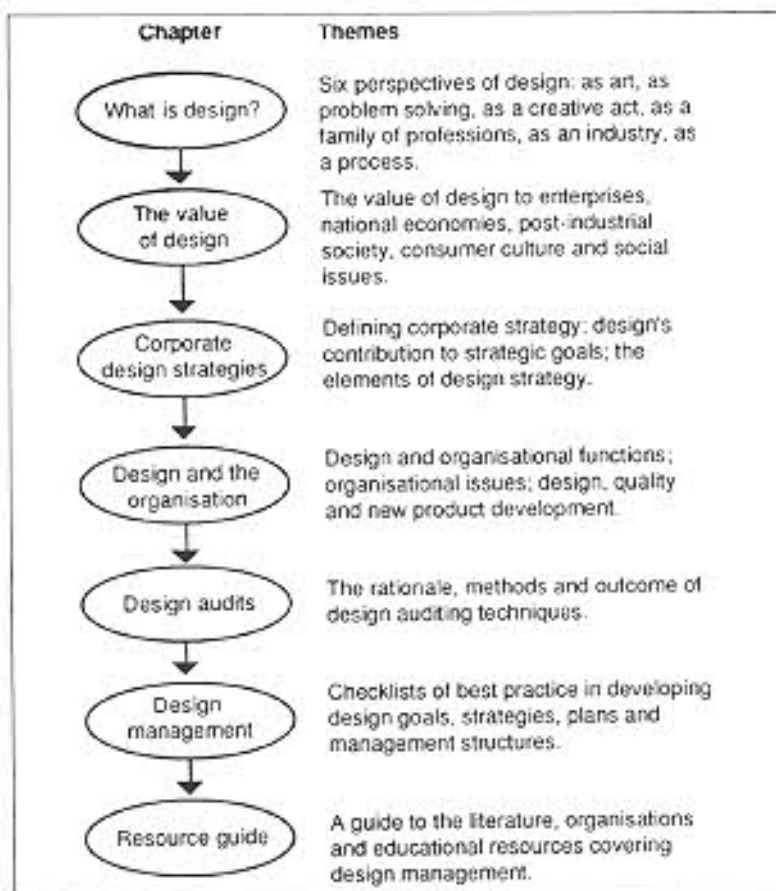Going beyond the usual bibliography of most texts, *The Design Agenda* concludes with a Resource Guide, which comprises an annotated selected bibliography organised by subject, a listing of periodicals and journals for those wishing to maintain an up to date understanding of the field, a listing of organisations that support and encourage design management, and details of the main educational and research bodies involved.

Structure of Content

The Book Map indicates the themes covered by each chapter, and a summary of the main arguments that are drawn from them.

Chapter	Themes
What is design?	Six perspectives of design: as art, as problem solving, as a creative act, as a family of professions, as an industry, as a process.
The value of design	The value of design to enterprises, national economies, post-industrial society, consumer culture and social issues.
Corporate design strategies	Defining corporate strategy; design's contribution to strategic goals; the elements of design strategy.
Design and the organisation	Design and organisational functions; organisational issues; design, quality and new product development.
Design audits	The rationale, methods and outcome of design auditing techniques.
Design management	Checklists of best practice in developing design goals, strategies, plans and management structures.
Resource guide	A guide to the literature, organisations and educational resources covering design management.

References

1 Letter to *Design Week*, 30 July 1993, p.11.
2 *Design Week*, 24 September 1993, p.22.
3 Owen, Ivor (1991) Comment, *Design*, March, p.9.
4 Kotler, P. and Rath, G.A. (1984) Design: a powerful but neglected strategic tool, *Journal of Business Strategy*, **5**(2).
5 Heap, J. (1989) *The Management of Innovation and Design*, Cassell, London, p.5.
6 Penn, Irving (1988) *Issey Miyake*, Little, Brown, Boston, Mass., p.19.