DESIGN MANAGER'S ROLES IN CORPORATE DESIGN MANAGEMENT

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Abstract. This research examines new directions in management and design theory and practice. It characterizes the role of design managers in corporate management. First, possible organizational solutions for design function have been described, including: a) creating organizational unit dedicated to design issues; b) dividing design management tasks among the existing organizational units (i.e. marketing, sales, production, research and development) without introducing design representatives; c) outsourcing design function. Then, it has been stated that design managers must perform not one but many different roles: those of strategic partner, design expert, change agent and an integrator. Finally, needed competencies of design manager have been identified. The basic aim of this research was to enrich cognitive knowledge within the discussed issue. It was achieved by the critical review of literature concerning the field of management and design; by identification, classification and explication of the examined area.

Keywords: design, design management, design manager, design thinking, managerial roles, managerial skills.

Jel classification: M10, L20.

1. Introduction

In the last ten years there has been observed a significant shift of interest in the area of the design issue concerning the theory and practice of management. Design is frequently found as a key competence and the instrument of achieving the competitive advantage (Beverland 2005). The consequence of this interest is popularization of the term 'design management'. Design management was originally combined with the process of new product development or referred to relations management between design agencies and their clients. There have been introduced new meanings over time (Ahopelto 2002; Lockwood 2009; de Mozota 2003).

Design management can be defined as a holistic management concept targeted on gaining competitive advantage through consciously using design in all the management's areas. As an innovative approach, design management has a set of certain features, such us: openness, flexibility, creativity. It is also joining freely skills from different fields and functions to shape consequently the business's identity,

which is manifested by offered products and services, relations with stakeholders and finally the way organization is managed (Brzozowski 2010).

Introducing design management to an organization is a complex challenge, and actually an exercise in strategic and cultural transformation, then it is surely the role of a design manager to be a catalyst for transformation (Jenkins 2010). Design mangers are dealing with organizational transformation by adopting new roles, which will be identified and characterized in this research. The basic aim of this research is to enrich cognitive knowledge within the discussed issue. It was achieved by the critical review of the selected publications concerning the field of management and design; by identification, classification and explication of the examined area.

2. Design management and organizational structure

Effective design management requires adequate organizational structure, which can be divided into three basic solutions.

The first one assumes creating a certain organizational unit in the company devoted to design function. The unit may have various status and position in the organizational structure, depending on the company's size, its structure, and the scope of design implementation. Some companies introduce design function by creating single positions (such as design manager), while others prefer creating elaborate organizational departments with design directors as a board members. The latter solution has been employed by such global payers as Apple and Philips, but also by regional leaders, for example by Polish producer of household appliances Zelmer.

The second solution assumes that the tasks concerning design management should be divided among the existing organizational units (i.e. marketing, sales, production, research and development) without introducing design representatives. The priority challenge in such situation is the necessity to describe precisely the fields of competence, the rules of cooperation and consolidation of actions which form design management. In this solution it is worth considering the idea of "drop box", which is a post serving as a contact point in cases concerning design. It is also possible to place design management representatives in every business group in the organization as it takes place at Nokia.

It is a usual practice in small companies to incorporate design into already existing organizational units, mostly to the research and development (R&D) department. It comes naturally since in case of R&D, the field of action determines the closest cooperation with design, because they both concentrate on the development of new products and technologies. The R&D unit itself by its variety, multi-perspective character and flexibility is close to design's manner of action (Cooper, Press 1995).

The final option is outsourcing design function. In order to implement such solution it is advisable to define the scope of outsourcing. It may only be partial out-

sourcing (the chosen aspect of design) or the total one (complex service provided by the external partner). The scope of outsourcing depends on the notion of design in an organization. It can be: core, core-related, marginal (high priority of outsourcing). First, the optimal scope of outsourcing is specified. Then, on the basis of the chosen criteria, the search for the partners takes place, and finally their choice. There can be distinguished several categories of potential partners in the field of design (Tuulenmäki 2004; Verganti 2006; Joaziasse 2008; Brzozowski 2011):

- design companies (i.e. PARK),
- design consultancies, design agencies (i.e. IDEO, VanBerlo Strategy & Design),
- freelance designers,
- universities and schools of design,
- design cluster initiatives (i.e. the Lombardy Design Cluster or the Finger Lakes region – the communities of designers, architects, artists, publishers, businessmen, technologists, art. critics, sociologists; such cooperation resulted in success of companies such as Alessi).

Regardless of the scope of outsourcing and partners, it is worth assigning an organizational representative, which will coordinate the process of choice and cooperation with the outsourcing partner.

3. Design manager's roles

Design manager should be a person responsible for the coordination of the process of design implementation in all its aspects. In terms of corporate personnel, design managers are becoming recognized specialists in many companies, and in many companies they have indeed entered the mainstream of corporate life (Joziasse *et al.* 2008).

In companies where design structures are organizationally well-developed design manager should be the key line manager, directly managing subordinate design staff. In the companies lacking such staff, the post might have the character of the advisory position (for instance at Polish furniture manufacturer Vox, the function is accomplished by design consultant, positioned in the organization structure as a consultant of the CEO) or a project manager. In other solutions, the function of the design manager is being assigned to managerial post dedicated to other, related functional area (mostly to marketing or R&D).

The variety of design manager's placement in the organizational structure and numerous of duties provide the evidence, that design manager is obliged to fulfill different organizational roles. Design management roles are continually evolving and they can range from the creation of corporate design policy through to strategic decision making and then to the management of specific design projects (Gornic 2008). Below its characteristics has been presented.

3.1. Design manager as a strategic partner

In the past, the design specialists (in most cases designers) were not treated as key members for the organization, since there was no directly defined connection between their actions and the strategic business objectives. Commonly, as a result of differences of characters and administered idiolect in describing reality, design specialists were unable to explain to top managers how significant and valuable their engagement and initiatives can be. Consequently both their position and co-related organizational units were not considered as a significant element of the organizations (not only by the board, but also line staff and themselves as well).

Nowadays, design managers and specialists are expected to have more significant attitude as strategic partners in the organization. The measure of their engagement and in consequence, success is the ability to define and achieve design's strategic objectives in conjunction with general company's objectives. It is possible by creating and implementing design strategy as a crucial element of the company's strategy. The position of the design representatives depends on the ability to solve complex organizational problems concerning design issues, which is the result of making use of a broad range of expertise, but first and foremost requires the ability to comprehend organizational culture and company's operations.

Design manager must have knowledge about the company's needs, take part in developing alternative solutions and display new ideas, which will become driving forces of its growth. The skills and ability to conduct dialogue and cooperation with representatives of other business functions (finance, marketing, production, human resources) are particularly important; on the one hand it allows to meet partners' mutual expectations, on the other hand it encourages the spread of information about implementation of solutions concerning design management in the company. Thus design manager becomes an essential bridge between different organizational functions. In order to become such a "platform", design manager needs to acquire elaborate business knowledge. Without the necessary knowledge, design manager cannot propose the whole range of effective solutions and becomes eclipsed and moved towards the margins of business decisions.

The implementation of corporate design management is often conducted within a team-oriented heterarchy. Vital and variable environment of such organizational structure implies the difficulty to predict expected solutions or ideas at regular intervals. On the basis of the chaos theory, similar complex systems are uneasy to undergo top-down management, neither follow given directives automatically (Brauer 2007). They tend to have much capacity to self-organization, which means that the interference in their function might and should be sustained at the minimal level. It may require from design manager the ability to keep his managerial role low profiled in order not to interfere with the group work of the design management team.

The role of strategic partner becomes a leading one. It decides about the significance of design in the business activity. It is not however the only one role. There

can be distinguished three additional roles which can be more or less exposed. These roles are: design expert, change agent and integrator (Brzozowski 2011).

3.2. Design manager as a design expert

The role of design expert is closest to the traditional perception of design in business and concentrates on the effective completion of assignments which form a design process, such as (Brzozowski 2011):
- creating "brief" (guidelines to the design assignment from different perspectives: technical, financial, market, functional and social),
- analysis and research connected with project directive (searching for the possible solutions and limitations),
- specifying the expected solution (for example product, services, organizational change),
- testing new solutions (in the real or hypothetical conditions),
- implementation of new solutions,
- evaluation of the course and effects of implementation,
- implementation of the budgets and costs management connected with design,
- current support of other organizational functions in the solving design-based problems,
- managing design risks,
- clarifying design processes to nondesigners.

3.3. Design manager as a change agent

Like other corporate professionals, design managers are experiencing the enormous changes taking place in technology, society and organizations. The role of change agent indicates for the design manager the necessity to take certain actions stimulating business development. Change agent's task is to persuade other organizational members to the proposed changes and to establish a coalition for change.

In this context creativity and effectiveness gain more significance by shaping organizational culture in such a way that amendments could be introduced. Furthermore, design managers may contribute significantly to the implementation process of organizational changes, for example by promoting and making use of design thinking. The features of design thinking are: team-working, creativity, empathy, experimenting, optimism and holistic thinking (Brown 2008; Stempfle, Badke-Schaub 2002). Integrating design thinking into organization is challenging because designers have a very different orientation than do managers and other organizational members (Candi, Samuelson 2007).

Design managers are expected to promote design-driven innovation in an organization. According to R. Verganti (2009) such an innovation is actually a radical innovation of meaning, which shifts the focus of innovation from traditional application of new technology to the delivery of meaning and value. Design-driven

innovation processes are in most cases tacit and invisible. Instead of methods and codified steps, they are based on networks of uncodified interactions among various innovation agents led either by design managers or top managers. Design-driven innovation is not exactly about being creative. Rather, it is about setting a direction and investing in relational assets, which become an engine of innovation. Creating design-driven innovations requires two competencies: knowledge of how people could give meaning to objects (products, technologies, systems, organizations), and the seductive power to influence the radical new meaning (Verganti 2009). Design manager's role is to help merging the various disciplines involved in the innovation process into a synergetic process and to combine visionary inspirational ideas with tangible and concrete solutions (Abbing, van Gessel 2010).

3.4. Design manager as an integrator

The design manager's final role is the one of integrator between designers and professionals representing other functional areas. Design manager becomes a bridge and a translator between "uncomprehend worlds" of: designers, managers, marketing specialists, technologists, financiers, human resources specialists (Veryzer 2005; Johansson, Holm 2008).

Table1. Differences between designers and managers

Characteristics	Managers	Designers
Aims	Long term Organizational durability, survival and growth Financial (value, profits, return)	Short term Product/service quality Reform, prestige, career building
Focus	People, systems	Things, environment
Education	Managerial, financial Engineering, specialist in particular subject	Art, crafts, visual Technical in particular subject
Thinking styles	Verbal numerical Linear Analytical Problem oriented	Geometrical Lateral Synthetic Solution led
Behavior	Pessimistic Adaptive	Optimistic Innovative
Culture	Conformity Cautiousness	Diversity Experimental

Source: adopted from (von Stamm 2008)

Examples of different characteristics of managers and designers are shown in Table 1. They include not only different values, behaviors, competencies, and attitudes, but also the language (von Stamm 2004; Verganti 2008; Micheli *et al.* 2012). Design managers must be good listeners and discover how to put the design mes-

sage across in the most effective way, and be able to generate positive consensual directions in decision-making procedures (Gosnic 2008).

Design representatives should form an effective cooperation and communication platform by creating interdisciplinary teams, which identify themselves with the entire project, not only its chosen functional aspects. The effect of integration should reflect the state of organization, where the individual risks become collective ones, individual aims are included in the collective course and instead of individual entrepreneurial approach, appears an entrepreneurial organization. Design function determines here not only a specified product, but the company's brand and image as well. That is why the design representatives' role in the process itself needs to be emphasized. Such interpretation of designers' cooperation enables them to rise the extent of identification not only with product itself but also with the company as a whole (Brauer 2007).

The characteristics of design manager's roles presented above was inspired by the theory of leadership styles by I. Adizes (1989), according to which every manager should take on four roles: producer, administrator, entrepreneur, integrator.

Successful leadership activities of design manager in the scope of described roles are conditioned by possessing certain competences. To name the important ones (Kerzner 2006; Lockwood 2009; Mills, Glass 2009; Brzozowski 2011):
- technical competences in design and other related areas that help to understand the essential assignments,
- interpersonal skills, which enable to establish and keep contacts with people representing various professions and organizational units,
- analytical skills and ability to develop awareness and foster insight, which enable to complete a problem diagnosis,
- conceptual skills and ability to anticipate and visualize new scenarios, which enable to solve creatively problems accompanying design project's and process's realization,
- organizational skills, which enable to design and implement an organizational system which helps to fulfill planned commitments,
- managerial skills in project management, which helps to complete and maintain an effective design management team, and reach the project's objectives,
- political skills, which help to influence design related stakeholders.

4. Conclusions

The research has critically examined expected roles played by design managers in organizations. The major findings of the research has shown that the variety of design managers' duties can be classified into four major roles, which are: strategic partner, design expert, change agent and an integrator.

All the mentioned managerial roles should be implemented in each organization. It does not however mean that it should be fulfilled by one person; effective

design management requires people who possess the whole range of features, who think and work in a different way. Highlighted roles should thus be accomplished by team of the complementary managers (the top managers' support is particularly important), because none of them is capable of completing all the roles simultaneously. While looking for a suitable design manager one needs to search candidates who are capable of playing all four roles and, equally importantly, capable of cooperating with other managers; through a joint cooperation the fulfillment of roles can be completed.

The presented typology of managerial roles has been developed particularly for medium sized and big companies. It will have to be validated through further applied research in enterprises.

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