



Analysis of the first 37 episodes of our Raconte Design Podcast by Brigitte Borja from Mozota.

Brigitte Borja de Mozota is a recognised expert in the field of design management. She is a researcher, lecturer and author of several reference works on the subject. Her work explores the impact of design on business performance and its strategic integration into management.

Her book 'Design Management' (published in 2003) is a reference work in the field. Brigitte has devoted her career to demonstrating the strategic value of design within organisations. She has played a key role in the recognition of design as a lever for economic, social and managerial performance, so it was only natural that we entrusted her with this analysis and synthesis mission, the transcript of which we share with you below.

Episode in French available here:

<https://design-integre.lepodcast.fr/raconte-design-integre-synthese-de-37-episodes-de-podcast-par-brigitte-borja-de-mozota>

Hello Brigitte,

Thank you for joining us on our podcast.

This episode is a little special because you are not an in-house designer but a design management researcher, and for this episode you have reviewed all 37 episodes of the podcast Raconte Design Intégré to identify potential patterns in the designers' discourses in all these episodes— themes whether in terms of their skills, profession and position within the organization, - or of innovative methods and tools they have implemented to manage and to demonstrate the value of design within their organization.

One theme emerged, which is likely to be obvious to all designers but perhaps not for non designers :

The designer creates human relations ; this may even be seen as his main task - to being a profession acting as a facilitator within the organisation around a project. Could you explain what you draw from listening to our episodes about this ability to listen, to understand, and to synthesize, that enable designers to bring together the various stakeholders of a project?

Thank you, Annabelle, thank you Denis, and thank you to your association for entrusting me with this study based on your podcasts. I carried out a statistical analysis of keywords, which allowed me to classify the verbatims from the 37 interviews. Through this, I was able to identify the concepts that structure the field of design within organizations.

The content of your interviews made it clear that designers hold different roles: they are designers, in-house designers, design managers, or design leaders. They speak of their craft, of its specificities, of the joy of being in -house designers, of the design function, of concepts of brand, innovation, strategy, and of the value of design.

What emerged most clearly from our analysis ,is that this study will hopefully help moving beyond certain stereotypes - particularly the stereotype that the job of in -house designers is less interesting ,less creative because practiced under more constraints.

Your interviews also highlight how the space of designers has grown within organizations. They provide evidence of humanistic values embodied by the design function , as well as the expertise and the value of designers' skills. One element that came up repeatedly was their research skills, especially user research.

I noted recurring sentences such as "bringing users' needs to the surface" or "understanding people's awareness." These all demonstrate that having an in-house design function truly creates long-term value for the organizations. What particularly struck me during this analysis was what I would call the « soft power » of an in-house designer— as a profession at the intersection of other professions. Designers are used to conduct external field research in a specific context, in order to understand the market and needs ,so they can act similarly as researchers internally.

Indeed, many interviews reflect the idea that the user, consumer, or client is not the designer's unique "client." Designers also serve all other functions within the organization—all the stakeholders in the system.

For example, I remember sentences like "we work a little with everyone " or "we are a point of convergence." This illustrates something that we as design management researchers strive to express : the horizontal, transversal nature of the design function within the organizational chart, and how this horizontal dimension is meaningful to explain our quest for the autonomy of the design function.

However, we must also recognize that organizations priority ask and undersand design as style or aesthetics —particularly true in France where design is still primarily perceived as useful for creating a form , giving a concrete shape , for brand strategy, corporate identity , or for imagining trend-books .

Yet even within this vision of design as style or aesthetics, when design is managed in-house rather than through an outside design consultancy, it leads to designing specific tools for brand management and team management – design books, for example, that may be co-designed with outside agencies are ultimately integrated into further collaborative platforms for the design team.

From your interviews, we see that the demand for design is evolving and expanding. This growth arises from a deeper understanding of the initial phase of the design process—its research phase, before ideation—emphasizing usability value and the importance of user research, and this ultimately permeates the entire organization.

For instance, some interviewees give the example of the persona tool—commonly used by designers to present research results. This tool can become a shared platform, a sort of database of use logic, accessible to all collaborators within the organization, useful not only for the designers but also for a broader market understanding of all in the organisation.

Across all these verbatims, we see the designer's genuine influence internally – a facilitator, a creator of links between people. From my perspective as a management researcher, this ability of connecting is also a power for cultural transformation. It goes far beyond design thinking as a simple experimentation exercise; being a facilitator through design can potentially transform the organizational culture itself, moving toward a more human-centered organisational culture – bringing both internally a more collaborative culture among colleagues and a customer-centric culture.

Through this ability to bring people together, highlighted by designers in their episodes, what would you say about the leadership of in-house designers as compared to other functions within the company?

What I found interesting in the interviews is the repeated focus on trust. Several remarks emphasize the importance of establishing trust upstream in order to exercise design leadership. This is particularly compelling because it shows how designers need to search for an entry point into an organization's culture. The human values associated with design are clearly expressed in this design leadership dynamics.

To deserve their leadership role, internal designers begin as observers, much as they do in external fieldwork research. When joining an organization, they observe how people live and work together. One statement that struck me was, “we look carefully at where we put our steps”, this perfectly captures this mindset.

Once they assume responsibility for defining a design strategy, they first search to inspire the desire to work with them. They look for an anchor—one interview even referred to it as a “point of mooring” within the organizational culture.

Ultimately, we see the emergence—already demonstrated in design management research—of a type of leadership in the spirit of Mary Parker Follett: a creative leadership exercised with people, rather than a hierarchical leadership exercised over people.

What is even more interesting is that this creative, people-centered design leadership can profoundly influence how a company thinks and how it is perceived in terms of competitiveness. It changes the company's relationship with the external environment.

One designer explained, "we bring a vision of real life," a perspective rooted in materiality, technology, materials, digital tools—but always seen through the lens of human behavior.

This represents genuine leadership for the design function, but it also influences the company's overall strategy. It can even lead to redefining the boundaries of the organization.

For example, one person spoke of modifying the company's partnership strategy: "As a designer, I can knock on the doors of our partners' design studios. I can work upstream on trends."

In doing so, they initiate new ways of managing innovation very early in the process, through cooperative approaches that prove highly effective. This, in my view, is particularly exciting: a creative leadership in collaboration with others stakeholders that, in return, reshapes organizational strategy.

Internally, designers mainly work with marketers and engineers. What did they highlight in our episodes regarding internal organization—what are the elements that either facilitate or hinder their work, that help them find their place within the company, and what types of position do designers hold internally?

If a young designer is listening to this podcast and consider choosing sometimes an in-house design position, I would say that there are essentially two types of roles :

The first is traditionally known as Art Direction: a role rooted in creation , drawing, form, craftsmanship, narrative, finishes, and the conception of a design language that conveys emotion, shared brand identity, and sensory experience. In some podcasts, some designers talk about sensorial intelligence "the artefact /the object that you hold in your hand"—the connection through design of objects with our body nature .

In short, this type of role involves to control quality and to act and guarantee coherence in the brand's messages and overall customer experience. This artistic direction is classic for design recruitment.

The second role is that of Design Manager or Design Leader. At first, one might think, "Management? That sounds dull," but it becomes fascinating when seen as a role of energy facilitator—someone who brings together different perspectives. Then design leadership is about showing direction, building connections, and consequently enhances project efficiency by saving time and by adding performance value to the design function within organizations.

For example , empathy is often mentioned, but empathy is also something that can be cultivated within organizations. Your interviews show this almost osmotic diffusion of empathy as a learned value within the organization. Thus, in-house designers and design managers carry the voice of the customer,

the voice of the human, within the organization. They can reshape processes - either design process or others so that « customer voice » is truly integrated into all organizational workflows.

At first glance, one might think such a role is less creative, but in my view it is far more creative—it offers much broader creative opportunities for designers. When discussing questions of the relationship of design and marketing, design and R&D, design and human resources, department and so on ... issues of power dynamics inevitably arise. But also the subject of about complementarity of expertises. Often, it is a matter of how the company's culture, and of its leaders maturity, of their understanding of designers' competencies.

This creates diversity in where are designers in organisations. Sometimes designers are positioned under marketing, but even then, they still can defend a different viewpoint effectively through design briefs.

A design brief can be a constraint, yet designers often find ways to transcend it, saying, "I may be seen as a stylist, but I will bring something more."

In general, organizational culture deeply influences the design function. Designers can help change that culture, but they must also listen to the organization's history.

Overall, companies tend to gain a more mature vision of designers' competencies—prioritizing design initiatives upstream and giving more voice and power to interdisciplinary collaborative culture.

Your interviews make it clear that in-house designers want and can participate in decision-making. But for this to happen, designers must be positioned on an equal footing. There must be no hierarchy between design, marketing, or R&D—there should be parity between all functions.

What makes in-house design unique is its capacity for a global vision and its ability to integrate into any project across the organization. Designers benefit from the richness of the dialog with the other professions, thus offering their services broadly and early in projects. It also opens opportunities to detect trends and opportunities very early on.

This richness—compared to agency work - allows more experimentation. Because they work upstream, it gives them greater influence downstream. The value of in-house design lies in its ability to add value at every stage of development. And even though designers often prefer to remain humble - "it's not us alone who make the company successful" - in reality, design plays a significant role.

Designers in house should not hesitate to show how they contribute to success by defining design evaluation tools. There are already many tools for evaluating brand performance, and with the development of UX design we see many new tools for measuring the quality of user experience, interface quality, and overall design effectiveness.

One should not hesitate to discuss return on investment (ROI) for design. Yes, design is an investment - and it is measurable.

Another aspect I found interesting is how in their interviews they mention networks and kindness— networks of ambassadors. Design teams are often of small size compared to the number of engineers or marketers. To exist as a collective, the challenge of in-house design is to reach a critical mass.

One interview mentioned creating the network of People for Experience, designed to bring together all actors working on interfaces, brand experience, employer brand, and customer brand—leveraging networks to sustain design's contribution to success.

In France, design is still primarily perceived as a creative activity, an artistic skill within companies—something related to drawing, aesthetics, form, and color. Listening to these 37 episodes, we understand that designers' skills go far beyond that. Could you share the specific capabilities that were most frequently mentioned in our episodes?

What clearly emerges is that all episodes speak of design in terms of strategy. Even when the word strategy is not explicitly used, the way design is discussed through its capabilities positions design as strategic— strategic because it concerns the survival and the future direction of the organization.

Designers impact on the strategic question of «Do we have the skills and capabilities needed to face future challenges?»

But if we say design contributes as new expertise to the organization's knowledge management then we must admit that design must be managed as such: this means to attach designers' specific and complementary expertise, to intertwine with the organization's existing knowledge capital.

Their diverse set of skills manifests and are useful at every step of the strategic path. Design attitude and vision skills are relevant for strategic diagnosis; design processes skills are necessary when ideating and implementing business innovation strategy; design know-how are required when translating this strategy into an organization's offering.

Acknowledging the fact that designers have specific expertise means accepting to position design at the strategic decision level, at a resource. Going even further, when designers are talking about their expertise in design process, they often emphasize their understanding of user practices - Their research capability in understanding users' behavior and users' experiences has become the key door of entry for design within organizations.

They also often discuss their ability to grasp interdependencies and systems interrelations.

At a time when we face so many challenges - often with contradictory goals - it is clear that we will need to imagine new ways of living, new experience paths, novel human behaviors but then we need to bring these into reality.

All of this aligns with Kaplan and Norton's strategic journey framework, which looks very similar to designers' creative process. I find their BSC Balanced Scorecard model more relevant to explain where to position design within all strategic approaches rather than to limit it to strategic innovation alone.

Regarding designers' attitudes and expertise, they often say in their own words: "Our first tool is the human being." One designer spoke of this as designers meta-competence ;this understanding of the overall organisation system from a human perspective, can lead to more collaborative management with HR on inclusive recruitment HE strategy or on socially innovative approaches to manage people within organizations.

There was an example of a company working with France Handicap alongside its designers on HR strategy.

In speaking about their capacities, designers express pride in their rôle - by appropriating their role as added new knowledge, they elevate design into strategic dialogue.

It was a genuine pleasure for me to listen to them : you could feel their joy in being able to follow a project from start to finish, their joy in seeing their products in people's lives, and their pride in connecting all stakeholders.

These are all strategic capabilities .

This is all the more remarkable that, in France, there is still very little respect for designers' skills —although this is slowly changing. But change is slow. And honestly, I do not know how to make this change faster, but it should .

Finally, what initiatives have designers implemented to promote design internally, to measure its impact, and to evaluate its contribution to the companies where they work? What stood out to you from these various designer journeys in terms of tools or initiatives?

Listening to them, it is clear that they are all proud to help their companies grow. For them, design management is not about control—it is about people.

As one of them put it, "At some point, the design function must take responsibility." Once a designer realizes that they have a vast space of opportunities ahead of them—that they can uncover customer needs and understand their deep aspirations - if that is not being strategic, what is it ?

But understanding this is not enough. Insights are often subjective, fragmented. At some point, they must be objectified. As one person said, "Once we understood that we could objectify it, we had a clear path ahead."

Helping the company develop by providing new means of growth is one responsibility designers embrace—especially in a changing world. Today we speak a great deal about CSR, about environmental responsibility, about the planet and climate change.

All of this impacts people's lives. Designers are deeply interested in human beings; they therefore carry the responsibility of accompanying organizational change in areas such as CSR. They mention eco-design, well-conceived and sustainable office work, and the motivation they derive from having the opportunity to develop research in this field.

This commitment drives innovation by design. Designers love the feeling of being useful—to society and to people.

It is unfortunate that this connection is still so poorly established in France - the link between the needs for change within companies and designers' skills in COMEX and medias

To conclude, I want to share some moving words from the interviews: “Creating a place for design within an organization is the work of a lifetime.” I believe that is true, and indeed it defines the life of an in-house designer—because it is an ongoing effort.

Another goal expressed was “to bring design to the executive committee table, and when design becomes part of the company’s culture, it is extraordinary.”

In the end, we can say: the fight continues. That is another expression I heard, and it resonates with me. I have been in this field for 40 years, and I feel that the work is far from over—even though we now have master’s programs, excellent schools, and doctoral programs and design directors .

We can close this podcast by saying: the fight continues.

Brigitte, thank you very much for this synthesis and analysis of our 37 podcast

**We would like to once again express our gratitude to Brigitte Borja de Mozota
for her analysis.**

**Find all episodes on our website:
<https://acdi-asso.fr>**

