

# INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

## CORPORATE EDUCATION PROGRAMS TO DEVELOP DESIGN MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP TALENT

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Companies seeking to deliver exceptional holistic designs to boost business performance require not only great designers, but great design management and design leadership. There have been numerous articles and studies seeking to prove that it is not the size of the design budget that necessarily leads to success, but in fact success is contingent on the way that design is led and managed. This is outlined in the case study published in the Journal of Product Innovation Management by Ricardo Chiva and Joaquín Alegre; Investment in Design and Firm Performance: The Mediating Role of Design Management<sup>1</sup>. Chiva and Alegre assert that “Design management plays a significant role in determining the effects of design investment on firm performance. Companies that manage design effectively and efficiently attain better performance than those that do not. Good design does not emerge by chance or by simply investing in design but rather as the result of a managed process.”

There are numerous post-academic educational institutions and programs that further develop good designers to advance fundamental design skills, which may well deliver good to great design output. Yet, as outlined above, good design is not the main contributor to success. The majority of these programs focus on design tools and methodologies and do not typically connect people or management skills, which are key contributors to success. There are also a handful of noteworthy design management programs in place, yet these programs often fall short in preparing participants to effectively implement these learnings back into their organizations. This lack of specialized ongoing education creates a shortage of notable design management and design leadership training. This lack of training creates a lack of talent, which in turn makes it hard to find. One simple way to find such talent is to use recruiters to try and lure them away from existing roles. This can be risky, time consuming, and expensive. Another way, perhaps more practical and more beneficial, is to train talent from within. After all, those currently employed by the organization already know a good deal about the marketplace, existing ways of working, how things may be improved, essentially know their colleagues, and understand the culture quite well. If internal training may be a better way to go, the challenges then lie in how to further develop existing resources.

Internal educational programs are gaining popularity and provide a return on investment to the organization through several key attributes: attracting top talent by offering a rewarding career ladder and the means to advance; retaining talent and lessening turnover, thereby reducing expenses in recruiting and onboarding; increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of design activities; as well as creating internal champions to further foster a design culture. The challenges in developing and delivering internal training programs include, but are not limited to: having the right expertise or partnerships, allocating the time away from projects for dedicated teaching & learning, and to apply new knowledge in a timely, practical and beneficial way.

Several leading global companies have taken major initiatives to develop and deliver internal training programs, such as LEGO, GlaxoSmithKline, and Unilever. The objective of these programs are to enable senior designers to grow into design manager positions, for design managers to grow into design leader positions, for design leaders to continue their rise in leadership, and for those coming from non-design backgrounds; to learn the fundamental skills in understanding how to manage design. In addition to industry organizations, many design agencies also seek to invest in developing management and leadership talent to better align and work with their industry partners (i.e. clients). In many cases, design is not formally organized inside their clients, thus giving agencies the opportunity to better manage and lead design, providing increased efficiency & effectiveness and thus moving from supplier to strategic partner.

No matter the position or title, the aim of such programs are for participants to 1) stay abreast of emerging and best practices 2) share previous experiences and current challenges 3) inspire, motivate and perhaps align with one another. All the while the overarching goals are for participants to (more) effectively and efficiently manage and lead design. These trainings are often conducted in engaging external environments outside of familiar facilities. These fresh environments keep the participants focused on learning and away from answering the daily demands of projects, pressing deadlines, disrupting colleagues and the like. Often is the case that this is the only opportunity people within the same company have to come together outside of shared projects.

For an organization to create design managers and design leaders, the first position they must take is to find those who naturally want to take the proverbial leap into this territory. Designers can be good designers, or they can be good managers; rarely can they be both. Finding them is easier when the organization makes a clear option in one's career path and provides the support to succeed.

### 1.1. CHOOSING A PATH

Likely at a point in one's career, there will come a pivotal point in which a decision must be made to continue doing and delivering design output, or to rise above the doing and manage or lead. While all designers essentially manage and/or lead design under their own projects, it is when their official role (i.e. title) changes that it becomes their responsibility and accountability to drive and deliver design results. In some organizations, this opportunity and distinction is made available to senior designers who can choose to continue to design or to grow into management and leadership positions. Figure 1 showcases the career ladder at LEGO, affording a senior designer an equally rewarding career as either a generalist or as a specialist. As a generalist, the former designer now has responsibility for managing teams to deliver according to design briefs as well as additionally developing people to support their personal development. As a specialist, the former designer continues to have a direct and increased contribution to project development with no responsibility in developing people or their team.

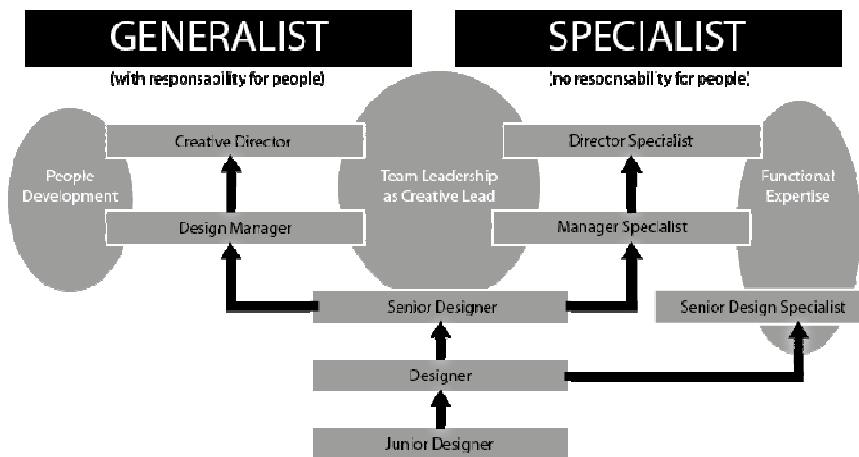


Figure 1. LEGO Designer Career Path

### 1.2. THE FUNDAMENTALS

Moving from a designer to a manager/leader often requires letting go of designing & details, which is naturally a characteristic of a designer. The manager/leader must empower the designer or design team to generate and refine design. This radical mind shift and methodology is why proper training of designers is instrumental for turning them into design managers and leaders. Figure 2 identifies key fundamentals that are required to manage design value (in the form of products, packaging, software, services, etc.). These fundamentals are often the focus of many internal training programs and are delivered anywhere from a dedicated workshop to comprehensive yearlong training programs. Basic fundamental topics to effectively lead and manage design should encompass design; process, briefing, tools, language, research, quality, and (as not shown) may also include general topics such as design presentation and design in the organization. It should be noted that in addition to mastering design

fundamentals, there are several other general fundamentals needed to effectively deliver design, namely managing projects, people and budgets. These additional fundamentals are often addressed in mixed programs with managers & leaders from other departments, internally or externally, as the skills are not specific to one discipline.

In order to best influence and implement design management & design leadership, one should undertake all or the majority of the fundamentals as they build upon and often integrate with one another. Internal training programs such as the LEGO Design Academy and GlaxoSmithKline Design Leadership training afford the time needed for participants to learn these fundamentals in a comprehensive program, running up to a 40 week period. In such programs the modules are presented in a logical sequence and build upon the previous. For example, design process is one of the first topics, of which all other modules will potentially encompass. A well-structured and written design brief is imperative, but is fully complementary to following a well-defined, clearly articulated and effective design process. And creating a design brief is a process in itself. Design research will integrate into the development process, require its own process & tools, and so on. Even in circumstances of there already being a well-defined process, there is typically room for improvement to become more agile, to update tools used throughout, and to better align with other development process within the organization, such as R&D and engineering, and so on.

In other such organizations, such as Unilever, marketers who are predominantly managing design are afforded internal design management training programs to understand how to best work with their agency partners. In such cases, these workshops have been delivered in one-day onboarding workshops teaching fundamental skills around design process, design briefing, and design quality.



Figure 2. Design Value Framework

Additionally, in order for one to truly master the fundamentals and manage/lead design well, he or she must possess the right competencies needed to deliver great design work. The competencies needed to drive these fundamentals can be broken down into three areas: knowledge, skills and attitude. Knowledge is rather straightforwardly and easily obtainable, and can be learned through direct teaching, reading, informational videos, etc. Skills are developed by directly applying the newly learned knowledge to projects and should remain in a perpetual state, driving continuous improvement. Attitude is the way one approaches and mentally processes the conditions at hand. It is arguable that attitude may be the leading competency in mastering the fundamentals. This disposition is often overlooked and underdeveloped, but is an essential element of success. Typically it is the unlearning or reshaping of one's general attitude towards design that is needed to take the leap from designer to

manager. Having the right attitude and outlook often makes the difference between average and excellence. This is why it is crucial to make a conscious decision and receive the proper training. Mastering the fundamentals along with the right competencies provides the right mix to enable design to flourish in an organization. Through the proper training of talent, the organization will surely benefit, namely with more efficient and more effective design output through more knowledgeable, motivated, and assured managers and leaders.

### 1.3. NAVIGATING THEIR ROLE

It is essential that one must know the differences between leading and managing design, and its implications. These two roles are commonly two sides of the same coin, but often require different skills and attitudes. For example, when working with a fundamental design element, such as design research, it is crucial to understand if one is leading or managing that subject, and how and when to shift between leading and managing. Leading design research may encompass setting the direction and objectives, while managing design research may encompass ensuring the proper resources, timelines and budgets are set and adhered to for the research to be delivered and applied to the projects. When switching between leading and managing, it is important to understand the strategy, desired output, the people involved, and enabling process(es). Figure 3 showcases a general navigational framework to identify different quadrants one may be active in when working across the fundamentals shown in Figure 2. Managers and leaders should frequently pose the questions to themselves of if they should be leading or managing content, people or processes.



Figure 3. Design Management & Leadership Navigation

### 1.4. APPLICATION OF LEARNING

What truly makes investing such time and money into extensive internal training programs such as the LEGO Design Academy is the application of learnings directly back into the organization. Each fundamental module, which is comprised of theory, definition, models, industry application via case studies and expert interviews is interpreted by the participant by means of an ending assignment. These assignments are worked on during an extended period of roughly 8 weeks, with professional coaching along the way. The assignments are finally presented to fellow participants as well as the instructors, who provide peer feedback both on content and presentation skills. This makes the learning more relevant, meaningful and easier to retain by immediately applying the participants' functional role. Additionally, it directly benefits the organization through increased efficiency & effectiveness promptly recouping investments in such programs. Furthermore, the program concludes with a final assignment to initiate a project of the participant's undertaking, either leading or managing, to improve something in the area of design. These final assignments are presented to sr. directors and often times the CEO, leading to major improvements in the organization and further justifying the investment in training internal talent.

In the event that an organization does not have enough internal design personnel to warrant an internal training program, there are external training programs offered whereby participants can participate with others from other organizations. It is imperative that special notice is given, such as: the program differentiates between design doing and design management versus design doing, the program is not just informative but engages the participants through applied learning, the program limits itself or is selective in the type of registrants (i.e. non

competitors) so that the participant can feel comfortable to share their challenges and ways of working with the group, and what is the return on investment.

In conclusion, assuming expectations that designers are currently and thoroughly trained through their (often dated) academic experiences or proactively seek out continuous education on top of their demanding professional roles are typically idealistic. By developing and implementing internal training programs, such as that exemplified by the LEGO Design Academy and Glaxo Smith Kline Leadership training, designers, managers and leaders who are supported by the organization are well positioned to be fully abreast, energetic and eager to deliver the utmost design value. Additionally, the design profession continues to grow in scope and demand, accompanied by a movement where more and more companies in-source design functions alongside growing design departments. Therefore, there is an increasing need to implement internal training programs to develop design managers and design leaders to help maximize impact across the companies' triple (people, planet, profit) bottom line.

<sup>1</sup> Chiva, R. and Alegre, J. (2009), Investment in Design and Firm Performance: The Mediating Role of Design Management. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 26: 424–440.