

The Role of the Design Professional in an Knowledge/ Entertainment Economy

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Few would argue that the US is nearly complete with a steady, if uneven, conversion from an Industrial/ Service economy to an Information/ Knowledge economy. The popular and professional press regularly serves up data on “gold collar” knowledge workers and/or technical professionals that are increasingly sought after, particularly in the high technology, medical, information systems and management consulting fields. The continued availability of high-speed, high quality technology hardware and software at moderate cost has, indeed, all but eliminated conventional rote work tasks and linear work processes. While American business has increased white-collar productivity by 2.2% annually since 1991, over 3 million white-collar workers have lost their jobs in this period. The revolution in portable integrated technology and the changing nature of white-collar work is beginning to blur our notion of *workplace*.

Sony’s 1993 550,000 sf San Jose, CA facility sports 280 miles of Category 5 wire and 870 miles of fiber optic cable. Video e-mail is coming where every workstation will support 2 gigabits of data per second at 5090 meters with multi-mode fiber optic. By 2000, over 14% of the world’s GWP was in telecommunications.

In health care, new developments in genetics and immunology are changing the acute care “salvage/ treatment” paradigm as managed care moves towards paying for wellness, not sickness. Gene warfare will allow us to target infectious disease by awakening the immune system to combat disease. Scientists are building cytokines that control immunology response, wound healing and nerve generation. Instead of a proliferation of critical care facilities, in the future we will see community-based ambulatory/ chronic care facilities for populations as low as 100,000 – 200,000. Cross-functional “Care Teams” will be focused on the patient/ family, not the physician, as the primary delivery instrument of health care. And the clients for design professionals will be the parties paying for services, not providing them.

In a Knowledge economy, wealth is created through intellectual capital. According to McKinsey & Co., products that come to market six months late will earn 33% less profit over five years. While Bill Orth at Steelcase’s Advanced Concepts Group says the new cellular component of work activity is the individual, I say it’s the Team. Work is no longer a relay race with batons – it’s a rugby match.

Additionally, the values and priorities of our nation continue to be increasingly dominated by a strong tolerance of high levels of entertainment packaging and merchandising. From baseball parks in their names, vendors, our disposable time and resources are the targets of unprecedented “design” of merchandising, advertising and environments.

In ages long and recent passed, the Architect was the Master Builder, responsible for the entire planning, design, cost, construction and furnishing scope of work. Whether the segmentation of “design” from “construction” due to the Chicago fire, or the unbundling of conventional delivery systems into Construction Management due to real estate explosion in New York in the 1960’s, the role of the design professional in recent decades has eroded. This erosion has witnessed the segmentation of design and project management service providers into clear and fuzzy fields of practice, with “Architecture” and “Interior Design” now accepted as separate disciplines on the flawed premise that you can’t be good at both.

The poor performance of Architects in the areas of programming, design excellence, cost management, project management and building commissioning in recent decades has failed to quash the erosion of work

scope responsibilities, influence/ control, stature and effectiveness from Architects and Interior Designers in the planning, design and construction process.

One of the great advantages that the design professional has in playing a leadership role in the Knowledge/ Entertainment economy is that we are the only discipline that is academically trained to develop problem-seeking/ problem-solving in a context that begins with no clear definition of “need” or outcome. The design professional is the party charged with the exciting and frightening responsibility to translate intangible and abstract data into functional physical form that inspires, is flexible, deliverable, on time and on budget.

As a result, the Design Professional is uniquely positioned to assume leadership responsibilities to align client/ user goals and objectives with a design process and delivery system that deliver to client objectives.

To do so effectively, we must understand how the rules change in a Knowledge/ Entertainment economy. “Design” no longer means just fitting the contents in the box. It means **“Designing with the Mind in Mind,”** because organizations depend upon the creation of new knowledge to remain competitive. My personal perspective is that the paradigm shifts are clear:

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Old Paradigm</u>	<u>New Paradigm</u>
Re-engineering	An event that changes roles, Responsibilities and reporting Relationships	An on-going process of re-invention and refinement to align resources with constantly changing objectives, requiring serious flexibility
Real Estate	A fixed expense	Competition for corporate resources requires containment + reduction of Occupancy costs
Efficiency	Cramming more people into Less space	Increase quality and quantity of work settings
Competition	Being \$.01 cheaper than rivals	Depending upon the creation of new Knowledge and focusing experimentation
Integration	Wiring every work setting for The Network	Combining people, technology, work processes and space to enhance performance and achieve better business results
Ergonomics	Having an adjustable task chair	Having balanced human factors relationships between people and <u>all</u> tools
Demographics	Average age of staff	Multi-valiant constituencies, with varying Cultural values, beliefs, behaviors, expectations, sizes, shapes + colors, requiring a multi-valiant planning + design response
Facility Management	Having a chair available for The next new hire	Function/ task-based facility responses that support work processes and successfully manage space conflicts between high concentration and high collaboration
Recruitment	Advertising for the next hire	A competitive work environment that supports the work process + allows valuable knowledge workers to fulfill rising expectations

Communication	Having enough conference rooms	Providing space allocation + quality for formal <u>and</u> informal, spontaneous, and serendipitous encounters
Keeping Up	Making the same mistakes that the last guy made	Thinking outside the box + reinventing reinventing process, criteria + space to attain changing objectives by supporting changing work processes that enable better work
Image	“Image is everything.”	Image must acknowledge changing values, diverse demographics, cultural migration and increased employee/ customer expectations
Space Allocation Criteria	Headcount, position on Organizational Chart	Invention, new work tasks, throughput, outcomes, recruitment/ retention, work quality, customer service: “It’s not <i>who</i> you are. It’s <i>what</i> you do.”
“Design”	“Style”	Functional work tools, flexible technology, an infrastructure that supports cost-effective change, improved communication, enhanced team performance, a discernable vibrant culture
“Business”	“Gross Revenue”	Margin, customer satisfaction, reduced cost, improved effectiveness, improved burn-in, improved information quality, enhanced communication

In our practice, we have become increasingly involved in data gathering and programming activities that are overtly “Strategic” in nature. While perhaps over-used, the term “strategic” implies an identification of client business goals and objectives in all pertinent areas – culture/ values, re-organization, work processes, technology, flexibility, human resources, etc. – and, by *Design*, an alignment of physical space with these objectives. This strategic alignment is what gives the Design Professional the most significant role and responsibility in the change management of any enterprise, because changes in technology, work processes, organization structure, values, etc., cannot successfully be made without impacting physical space.

Aside from the obvious role for design professionals to fully grasp and respond to client needs to support more dynamic, interactive and collaborative work processes with new outcome objectives (faster, cheaper, improved customer service, increased time-to-market, etc.), and to give form and expression to client culture and value/ belief structures, the design professional in a Knowledge/ Entertainment economy also has both opportunity and obligation to perform at the level of a strategic value-adding business partner.

Our recent efforts for the regional grocer, Heinen’s, began with a data dump of the company’s self-perceptions, strategic business objectives, current delivery processes, operational practices and challenges before we picked up a pencil. A “lessons learned” iteration in reviewing previous projects indicated to all that the prior tactics, design concepts and delivery systems were out of alignment with the company’s Strategic Business Plan, and were not delivering responses that aligned with the goals and objectives derived from an intimate, clear understanding of customers’ needs, complete with sub-group demographic considerations.

The re-design focuses the capitol resources on tactics and design initiatives that differentiate Heinen’s from their competitors in tangible, fun ways that allow the customer to perform their tasks in a quicker manner,

with far better lighting on product and information that entertains as well as informs and delights. The first new prototype in Twinsburg, OH is an award-winning outcome where “**Design**” begins with a capital “**D**”, not a lower case “d”. The distinction, coined a few years ago by Karen Daroff of Philadelphia, PA, refers to Designers practicing “Design” at this Strategic level, rather than just dealing with product and finishes (“design”). In a Knowledge/ Entertainment economy, the Design Professional’s response can no longer be idiosyncratic or egocentric.

Not all clients in the Knowledge/ Entertainment economy are prepared to “walk their talk.” We recently experienced a client that manifested the classic progressive values, beliefs, technology, demographics, work processes, interaction/ communication needs and design sensitivity of a Knowledge Economy Integrated service provider. Discussions with firm constituents up and down the firm’s food chain hierarchy indicated a vibrant, collegial, informal culture, with a strong emphasis on informal interaction, socialization across the food chain, including firm member spouses and significant others. When asked where the bar should be set on a set of bi-polar attributes, including “formal” vs. “informal,” the Partners’ consensus was, “You can’t make our new space informal enough.”

Yet, when we proposed that just two of the eight meeting/ Team Rooms should be designed with informal lounge furniture with wet media boards in living room-type settings for informal discussions and displayed thinking, the client initially agreed, only to later ask us to re-design the rooms in a conventional conference-table setting, fearing the informality they initially craved.

In order to function in a Knowledge/ Entertainment economy as a value-adding business partner, design professionals need to make “design” accessible to clients, but presenting the power of design to re-define work tasks and interactions, client/ consumer experiences and perceptions, and/or to enhance patron entertainment and delight to clients in ways that clients can understand and embrace. This implies that the design professional is willing and able to become intimately familiar with the client’s operation, business goals and objectives, decision-making criteria and consensus-building processes, and that the client and design professional are able to collaboratively define measurable outcomes to benchmark success or the lack thereof. In the corporate setting, this implies a “business-based” approach to planning a design where “design excellence” is driven by the client’s business-based design criteria. The implications of the challenge are that Design Professionals develop high analytical skills to play ball with CFO/ CEO-level client constituents who can articulate objectives and support a rigorous dialogue with the Design Team, whereby client goals and objectives are translated into physical space and performance-driven Design Criteria, against which the Design response can be benchmarked for efficacy to the Business Plan.

The opportunities for and demands of the Design Professional in the Knowledge/ Entertainment economy are great, as are the risks and rewards. But the risks are far greater in leaving “design” as a word spelled with a lower case “d.”

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