The customer experience is the next competitive battleground.

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The purpose of writing this paper is to make a case for introducing a stronger foothold for design in the boardroom where the leadership of the company makes important decisions regarding the future vision and direction of the company. If the leadership is convinced of the importance of design, then design culture will automatically trickle down to the other employees in the company. However, to introduce design from a bottom up approach is not very easy to do as design encompasses the whole vision of the product and the company, and not just the small divisions that the employees work on.

In this paper I am going to talk a little bit about how I see design and the impact that it can have on the world. Design is creating something new. It involves changing the world from the state that it is to the state that it ought to be. It involves changing existing situations to newer and more desirable ones. What design is not therefore, is any process which does not change the existing situation or state of affairs into newer more desirable ones. Some process that is rigidly defined according to some norms, procedures and rules like ringing a cash register, or following traffic laws, is not design. However, creating a cash register which produces fewer errors and makes the life of the teller easier, or creating traffic laws such that the rate of accidents is significantly reduced in an area, this constitutes design. As this involves, using one's mental capacity, to think creatively, by utilizing and enforcing the constraints of a particular situation to create a newer more desirable situation.

Design however, is not something new. People have being engaging knowingly or unknowingly in the field of design since the beginning of time. Every time someone aimed to create change in a way to create a more desirable situation, they engaged in the activity of design.

However, simply creating something to create a change in an existing situation to a more preferred one doesn't completely justify the term design. To me design means creating something new that is right, desirable, useful and usable. If we simply create something new that does not function well or take into account the human needs of the people whom we design for, but only superficially aims to do so, then we are engaging in design just for design's sake.

Creating something for others is a form of service. "To serve successfully demands an ability to cause change toward desired goals."[2] In a service relationship the one who is rendering the service, strives to serve the one who is being served according the needs of

the person being served. "Being on par in terms of price and quality only gets you into the game. Service wins the game" says Tony Alessandra the well-known marketing guru. Something on similar lines is also echoed by the words of Ben Cohen of Ben and Jerry's -"There is a spiritual aspect to our lives – when we give we receive – when a business does something good for somebody, that somebody feels good about them!"

Design is service done right. The purpose of design is to serve. For the purposes of this essay I am going to use the "client" as the entity being served, however feel free to replace that with any stakeholder in the product development chain. Service requires knowing what is pleasurable, needed, wanted, required, or not required by the client. The core aim of business too is to deliver value to its clients. Kaplan and Norton say "Satisfying customers is the source of sustainable value creation"[9]. Value can be truly created for someone when we know what is valuable for them.

People are inherently complex. They have irrational fears and prejudices. However, it doesn't make sense to say that people are irrational and then leave it at that. Behind peoples irrational motivations lie hidden past experiences, traumas, stories, etc which ultimately cultivate a person's decision making process. The purpose of design is to understand that hidden rationality. It is to understand that the choices that people make are so not because of their current conditions and reactions to the present, but also the huge past that they have just lived and continue living at every moment. Change is inevitable and people are also constantly changing. The decision that a person makes today might seem absurd to the very same person a few years ago. Design therefore also aims at understanding the hidden rationalities behind the clients' irrational prejudices so that we can better cope with change.

One way of figuring out the hidden rationalities behind the irrationalities is to midwife the desiderata of the client[5] to figure out what they really are asking for. The function of design is to help the client express itself in a manner to facilitate what it truly wants. People are emotional entities. They function on feelings. Generally, If something feels good, they accept it and if something is a danger to whatever they stand for, they reject it. People don't know what they want. They just know how they want to feel. The job of the designer is therefore, to work with the clients, to externalize those feelings and create an embodying artifact which creates a feeling of consummation for the client. A good design makes the client feel a sense of completeness and satisfaction. This feeling of completeness springs from the initial feeling of discomfort that the designer initially began working with. However, what might lead to a feeling of satisfaction for one person might lead to a feeling of dissatisfaction for another person as different people have different tastes and a different mental model of the world.

Therefore, design deals with ultimate particulars. Ultimate particulars are those things which are completely unique. It is impossible to design for a general use case as there are no general use cases. It is impossible for two situations, users, objects, scenarios or anything else to be truly unique. That is why design is so complex. The complexity of a particular situation when blended with the complexity of particular people leads to create a very particular situation and context that the designer has to work with. It is impossible to design something to be used by everyone, anywhere, at any time, and in any context, and at the same time create a satisfying feeling for users. Since different people have different mental models of the world, they use things differently and we cannot predict how things that we design, will be used by the world.

This is where storytelling plays a powerful role in the design process. "Human agents have a surprising and infinitely expandable ability to create stories, forms, and concepts."[3] "We seem to possess a narrative or dramaturgical impulse to make sense of unfamiliar situations by telling stories about them. We continually seek to make sense of things strange to us by fitting them into versions of familiar stories. Hence, when we ask someone to tell a story about a new situation, we ask him to pay conscious attention to a sensemaking process in which he is already tacitly engaged."[7]. The story is the initial frame of reference that we see the design problem with. From this perspective, the design process is a frame experiment." As [inquirers] frame the problem of the situation, they determine the features to which they will attend, the order they will attempt to impose on the situation, the directions in which they will try to change it. In this process, they identify both the ends to be sought and the means to be employed."[8] "Beginning with one way of framing the problem, derived from a particular generative metaphor, we invent and implement solutions whose unanticipated effects make us aware of the selective attention or mistaken assumptions built into our initial frame. We become aware of values we did not know we held until we violated them."[7] Stories however, do not encompass the complexity of the whole situation. Thus, designers face a dilemma of what complexities to consider and what complexities to ignore.

"Once a design dilemma has emerged, it may be resolved or dissolved in a variety of ways. Resolution may take the form of an invention that satisfactorily meets requirements which had seemed, until the moment of invention, to be interactably inconsistent. Or it may take the form of a mixing of values so that all may be achieved at some satisfactory threshold, though none is optimized. Or a dilemma may be resolved by deciding that some values take priority over others."[7]

Deciding which values take priority over others is what the leadership of the company is

expected to do and expected to do well. Leadership requires the ability to make decisions quickly, with less amount of information available, and without a complete picture of an anticipated future. This is what any persons leading a team or business are expected to do by their followers or employees. When these decisions are not well taken, they lead to consequences which are undesirable and unforeseen and which lead to a waste of time, money and resources, what to speak of employee morale.

Therefore it is required that important decisions which can make or break companies, are informed by designerly ways of thinking and knowing. It is important for design thinking to gain prominence in the world of business if any real value is to be delivered to customers or clients.

Design thinking requires dealing with complex problems. Complex/wicked problems are problems which change their nature the more we explore and dig deeper into the roots of the problem. Dealing with these kind of problems therefore involves effective double loop learning. This means learning which reshapes the problem itself as well as the goals that we intended to reach in the beginning. "Learning what the problem is IS the problem. Whatever he learns about the problem, becomes a feature of its resolution."[6]

This kind of learning can of course be only done in an environment where the stakes are low. If you feel you are responsible for your actions then it will stifle your creative process and it will not lead to the best outcome. You have to feel safe to design. You have to have the opportunities to make mistakes so that you can learn from them and make intelligent decisions. Design thinking therefore requires reflective practice. The designer has to constantly reflect on the previous decisions he/she makes and learn from the outcome to see whether the situation could have been improved if a different decision was made or a different parameter was considered. However, if the pressure is too high you can't engage in reflective practice.

Thus a professional who has been trained in reflective practice and in dealing with real world problems of a complex nature is a good person to have in the room where such problems are being dealt with and decisions being made. This person will be able to better design solutions for real life problems as opposed to someone who is trained in technical rationality or other traditional ways of thinking and decision making. Good decision making is all about leveraging the right amount of trade offs. A designer is trained to work with tradeoffs as tradeoffs are a part of everyday real life.

One mistake that we often make while talking about design is that we try to measure design with the yardstick of science, art, religion or some other pre established discipline.

However, we have to realize that design is its own discipline."Just as the other intellectual cultures in the sciences and the arts concentrate on the underlying forms of knowledge peculiar to the scientist or the artist, so we must concentrate on the "designerly" ways of knowing, thinking, and acting."[1]

In conclusion, I would like to make the case that in order to move forward successfully and meaningfully it is absolutely required that design plays a key role in the decision making process executed by the leadership of the company. We cannot predict the future and "exactly what will transpire is uncertain, but the signs are unmistakable - new technologies, new markets, new forms of business organization are fundamentally altering our world, and, without doubt, new design ideas and practices will be required to meet new circumstances. The greatest degree of uncertainty, however, revolves around the question : whose interests will they serve ?"[4]

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