Chapter 1
Design is to design a design to produce a design

\[1\] Heskett (2005:3)
At first glance, the title of this chapter might not seem to make very much sense. Yet it uses the word ‘design’ in four very different, but useful, ways. First, design is a field or discipline. Second, design is an action or process. Third, a design is a concept, proposal or plan. Finally, the outcome of a design process is also called a ‘design’. This chapter examines all these uses of the word ‘design’. It then asks if design is in fact an attitude, rather than a profession, available to all of us? Case studies of two value-driven design consultancies help us to address this question. The chapter ends by considering the link between design and innovation and the extent to which design itself is changing.
1.1 Design as a field

The design sector
(below)
Here, ‘design’ refers to a grouping of professional and commercial activities that contribute to a national economy. The design sector is now often located within the broader categorization of the ‘creative industries’, which are seen as key to the competitiveness of national economies.

Related activities
— Fine art
— Graphic design
— Fashion design
— Crafts (e.g. small-scale furniture makers)
— Multimedia design

Peripheral activities
— Manufacturing industry
— Modelling and prototype making
— Research and development within industry

Related industries
— Public relations
— Management consultancy
— Architecture

Core activities
— Design consultancies
— The design component of industry

2 Buchanan (1992:9–10)
Design is a field or discipline. Design in this sense is aligned to our material and visual culture, it relates directly to the artefacts and products of our human-made cultures. The field of design can be explored in a number of ways.

Design history

Design history is the broad academic discipline investigating the function, form and materials of artefacts of the pre-industrial and industrial periods, up to and including the present day. It focuses on artefacts’ production, dissemination and consumption as well as their cultural, economic and social meanings.

Design studies

The emerging field of design studies examines design and its role in society from a broad range of critical perspectives. It considers design from the perspective of disciplines such as history, philosophy and sociology. Design studies focuses on contemporary design practice and culture, and explores the ‘what?’ and ‘why?’, as well as the ‘how?’, of design and designing.

The design industry

Design can also be used in this sense to indicate an industry or set of professions, as in ‘the design industry’, or ‘the design professions’. You’ve used the word in this way if you’ve ever said ‘I want to work in design’. Government also talks about design in this way when it discusses the importance of design to the economy. Here, design is a grouping of professional and commercial activities. A business also talks about design in this way when it describes itself as being ‘design-led’.

Design management

The discipline and profession of design management is concerned with the management of design strategies, processes and projects. We might also say that design management focuses on the effective strategic exploitation of design for commercial gain, as design is increasingly seen as a primary strategic asset for any organization.

Design and art

Design is often considered in relation to art, and the two fields certainly overlap. Art puts a primary emphasis on self-expression; it is a creative activity whose origin and motivation is personal to the individual. Design is based not on self-expression but on discovering a problem shared by many people and trying to solve it. Design is inherently constrained by the demands of a client, a brief or a market. Design, therefore, represents a different type of creative activity to art. Design has in fact been known as ‘applied art’ and ‘commercial art’ at different points in its history.

Design and craft

Design can also be considered in relation to craft. Craft production is usually based on traditional, skilled manual labour and produces artefacts in small numbers. Design is generally aligned with mass manufacture, however designer-makers design and make their products to bring together their creative ideas and making skills in individual or batch productions of their designs. This approach is attractive to those designers seeking an alternative to mass-production orthodoxies.

Categorizing design

The field of design is often sub-divided into further categories. We might talk of broad areas in which design is explored by professional designers and also by non-designers. These design areas are defined in terms of the nature of the design outcome, the type of thing that is designed. Ways of categorizing design outcomes are explored on pages 22–23.

Categories of design

1 Symbolic and visual communications.
2 Material objects.
3 Activities and organized services.
4 Complex systems or environments for living, working, playing, and learning.

3 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, UK (1998:35)
Design is also a verb describing an action or process. We use ‘design’ in this way when we talk about ‘designing’. Designers have fought hard to gain recognition for what they do as being more than mere styling or decoration.

Historically, design was at the end of the business or product development process. Product designers, for example, have often been confined to providing a shell for a new piece of technology developed by engineers. Design is increasingly seen as a more fundamental process concerned with the creative conceptualization of our communications, products, systems and societal structures.

We’re all designers?

It is sometimes said that everyone is a designer. The planning and patterning of our actions towards a desired result constitutes designing. In this sense, everyone who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones can be said to be designing.

Three design process models
(right)
The act of designing is sometimes formalized in a design process model. There are many representations of the design process, reflecting the many ways there are of designing. These models of design process often appear to have little in common with each other. Rather than thinking of design as a single process that we all follow in the same way, we might think that every designer has their own process that is personal to them. Models are abstractions of reality; how accurate can a design process model actually be in depicting designing?
So we are designing when we follow a recipe, when we compose a piece of music, even when we decide what to wear in the morning (we’re designing our ‘look’ for the day). This universal sense of designing, in which we are all designers, is sometimes thought of as one of the fundamental characteristics that make us human.

What are the limits of this broad idea of designing? Some writers think that writing or talking about design is a form of designing, because by discussing design we are in effect ‘designing design’; that is, defining and redefining the field of design (see pages 24–25).

**Design process models**

The act of designing is sometimes formalized in a design process model, but who are these design process models for? Do designers use them? Often not.

Are they devised by theorists trying to demystify or explain an activity (designing), which is beyond analysis? Or are these models developed by designers in response to an expectation, perhaps from their clients, that they do use a model?

A key aspect of the idea of design as an activity or process is that we learn how to do it. We may have an aptitude for designing, but we develop our capability for designing through experience and, often, formal design training and education. The extent to which designers are ‘born or made’ is up for discussion. Like a self-taught or instinctual musician who is afraid to analyze too closely what he or she does, for fear of losing their apparently mysterious musical ability, some designers are reluctant to delve into the process of their designing too deeply. It might, of course, suit professional designers to maintain that designing is the preserve of a ‘chosen few’!

The opposing view is that designers don’t own designing and that design capability, like creativity, is potentially inherent in everyone, everywhere.

**Design is values made visible**

Designing is also a culturally bound activity. While we may think of a particular designer, perhaps even ourselves, as having a gift for designing, it is certainly the case that our influences and values are expressed when we design. In this sense, no one designs in a vacuum, design always reflects the context in which it takes place. Design is ‘values made visible’, where those values are both personal and collective.
1.3 Design as a concept or proposal

Design is also a noun meaning ‘a concept, proposal or plan’. Design can be defined as our ability to prefigure what we create before we create it. This is one way in which design differs from craft; the craftsperson often does not know the outcome of the making process when they begin. Instead, the craftsperson explores and experiments through making. The designer, on the other hand, knows the outcome of the production process before it starts; the designer’s work is done prior to manufacture. The outcome of this process of ‘prefiguring’ is a concept, proposal or plan, which is then produced or manufactured.

**Design models**

This definition of design derives from the way in which a Renaissance painter would first sketch out an outline of his composition before committing valuable materials to the realization of the painting. A design model, for example, serves the same function. Materials are valuable, and it is easier to make changes to a design before we commit resources to realizing it in tangible form.

Modelling is also useful because we may be less inclined to make changes to, and take risks with, something we have begun to build in the real world. The early phase of design is a form of play as we experiment with possibilities that still only exist on paper, in foam or in a virtual environment. Once this phase is complete, we might build a more refined model that functions as a prototype, for eliciting user needs or testing in terms of technical or user feasibility.

**Degree of realization**

A design proposal suggests an intervention in a scenario or context with a view to bringing an improvement. As such, the design concept needs to be realized to an extent that is sufficient to convince a client, user or consumer (and also the designer) that it can work.

A design proposal may go through much iteration, from a rough sketch to a detailed blueprint for automated manufacture.
Design concept sketch
(below)
A design concept or proposal can be expressed as a basic sketch. Even very complex design concepts, such as a bridge or skyscraper, can initially be shown in very crude terms. The iconic shape of Norman Foster’s completed ‘Gherkin’ office building in London is apparent even in this early sketch.
1.4 Design as an outcome

The Freeplay Indigo Lantern
(below and right)
A design outcome is an embodiment or realization of a design concept. A manufactured product like this wind-up lantern is a physical design outcome. The detailed design specification ('blueprint') used for its manufacture can also be considered to be a design outcome, albeit one that is less tangible and used as a means of creating something physical.

The outcomes of designing (perhaps formalized in a design process) can take a wide range of forms and scales – from a pasta shape, to a building, to an urban plan. It’s also worth bearing in mind that design outcomes (the things we design) are not necessarily physical or tangible.

In each categorization (see the ‘Design outcomes’ box below) there is a progression from very concrete outcomes to outcomes that are more intangible. The maturing of design as a profession is reflected in the growing ambition of designers in applying their design capabilities on ever larger scales. An increasing range of outcomes can be seen as the fruit of a conscious application of ‘design thinking’.

### Service design

An example of the growing ambition of designers in identifying where they can usefully intervene is the emergence of the specialism of service design. This is a mode of designing characterized by the creation of services, rather than simply products.

Physical products can be viewed as the means by which services are delivered, and at the heart of service delivery is an experience. While a service may seem intangible in itself, it will incorporate a number of ‘touchpoints’, all of which involve conventional tangible design outcomes. Service design therefore includes the creation of many other forms of design outcome.

### Design is a political act

Therefore design suggests an intervention in a scenario or context with a view to bringing an improvement. As such, all designing is political. Guy Bonsieppe’s notion of ‘political’ was ‘the citizen contributing to a broad political dialogue within society, where the question being asked is “in what sort of society do we want to live?” rather than a narrow view of party politics’. This can be clearly seen in the categorizations given in the ‘Design outcomes’ box below.

The design of ‘futures’ and opinions has far-reaching consequences not only for our material world (what we make and how we make it) but also for our mental life (how we think about the world and our place within it). The more ambitious the nature of a design outcome, the more responsibility we have to consider the implications of the change it might entail.

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**Design outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objects</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
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<td>Places</td>
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<td>Messages</td>
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<td>Environments</td>
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<td>Contexts</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Futures</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Many different categorizations of design outcomes have been proposed, varying in complexity:

- **Products** Objects, things, industrial design, ergonomics, consumer goods
- **Capital goods** Means of production of consumer goods, production machinery
- **Buildings** Architecture, physical structures
- **Urban areas** City planning, built environment
- **Transportation** Networks and infrastructures
- **Communication systems** Telephone networks, ‘virtual’ systems and networks
- **Institutions** Hierarchical and functional structures
- **Festivities** Events, temporal design
- **Markets, public services, laws** Codes for and means of living
- **Processes** Methodologies, ways of working and doing
- **Opinions** Philosophies, ways of seeing

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1.5
Design is an attitude not a profession

There is increasing debate in design courses, magazines and websites as to whether the act of designing should be seen not just as a profession, which is sanctioned by paying clients, but as an attitude. Put simply, an ‘attitude’ is a collection of values and beliefs around a certain subject, held by an individual, which makes them act and react in certain ways. Viewing design as an attitude, rather than just a profession, gives designers the responsibility to ask what kind of designer they wish to be. This is not a new concept but, unfortunately, it is still a novel one. Design thinkers such as Richard Buckminster Fuller, László Moholy-Nagy, Victor Papanek and Norman Potter debated this issue throughout the twentieth century.

The scope of design

For far too long, the design community has viewed political, social and environmental concerns as being beyond its remit. This status quo has been upheld by a design education system primarily concerned with training future designers for the business of designing and selling ‘stuff’.

Design thinking and design craft

What is the difference between design thinking and design craft?

Design thinking is the ability to apply creativity to the formulation and resolution of problems and challenges.

Design craft is the ability to translate this design thinking into design outcomes, either tangible (such as a product) or intangible (such as a service or way of working). Design thinking is a capability we all have to varying extents.

We only acquire design craft through training and practice, such as traditionally delivered by design schools. So we might say that while anyone can be a designer, not everyone is a designer in the sense of being able to apply ‘designerly’ ways of thinking to the generation of actual design outcomes. To do that, we need design training and a different set of aptitudes and skills.
Design has been downgraded from being fundamentally engaged with an understanding of ideas, and a powerful tool for social change, to the learning of often mundane technical capabilities.

This situation is beginning to be questioned by a new breed of young, determined, creative idealists who want to harness both design craft and design thinking as levers for political and societal change. New perspectives, ideas and technologies are being harnessed to push designing beyond being just a tool for business.

When we are surrounded by problems and challenges, design presents a positive approach to generating ideas, connections and solutions. This is evident in websites and forums such as www.treehugger.com. It is also evident in ideologically led design exhibitions such as the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum’s Designing for the Other 90% (2007) (see pages 154–155) and the British Design Museum’s Sustainable Futures (2010). The Society for Responsible Design’s annual Change exhibition showcases the directions that graduates from top Australian universities see the world taking. Previous student exhibitors have become Australian Design Award finalists, with some designs receiving global exposure.

Design does not belong to designers

Traditionally, the design industry has been the domain of self-appointed professionals with a recognized art or design school education. Status as a professional designer was based on a formal design training. This is changing as increasing numbers of professionals without a traditional design education are working in the design industries. You don’t necessarily have to be a designer or to have undergone design training to work in the design sector.

Designers have never had the same professional status as, for example, architects, who must undergo an approved training programme before they qualify and begin practising professionally. Design has never had that degree of professional protection, and so we see increasing numbers of design professionals who are not professional designers in the traditional sense. Design companies may be headed by people who have no formal design training, but who do have wider experience that they bring to bear on the management and application of design to real-world challenges.

These non-designing champions will, of course, lead teams of traditional designers in the translation of design thinking into specific design outcomes through the application of design craft. So we might say that while designing still belongs to designers, design itself does not.

The broadening engagement in professional design can be seen as a sign of design’s increasing maturity as a sector. Design is strengthened by the involvement of professionals from beyond the traditional art and design school. Fields such as psychology, sociology and ethnography have much to contribute to the effective application of design to our growing shared societal challenges, and they bring expertise that is not necessarily to be found in designers themselves. Those with training and expertise in these other disciplines can help to direct collective design thinking in the best direction. It is then generally for designers themselves to implement this design thinking in the most successful ways possible.

“The idea of design and the profession of the designer has to be transformed from the notion of a specialist function into a generally valid attitude of resourcefulness and inventiveness which allows projects to be seen not in isolation but in relationship with the need of the individual and the community. One cannot simply lift out any subject matter from the complexity of life and try to handle it as an independent unit.”

László Moholy-Nagy
Vision in Motion, (1947:42)
Case study

Celery Design

The ecological guide to paper
(below)
Celery Design developed this guide to help their studio, clients and the wider design community to weigh up ecological considerations when choosing papers. The guide directs them to the very best recycled and tree-free papers on the market.

This tool is freely available online at www.celerydesign.com/eco-tools.
Celery Design is a Californian visual communications company that advocates and demonstrates a new model of graphic design that deals proactively with social and environmental challenges. Their work is increasingly recognized with awards such as the Environmental Leadership Award from the American Institute of Graphic Arts. *ID* magazine acknowledged them as one of their top 40 most influential design firms.

Celery have developed this role by working for like-minded industry leaders in corporate responsibility, while also seeking to influence other graphic designers to embrace sustainability as a crucial design objective. They achieve this through frequent lectures, magazine articles and public outreach projects.

### Adding strategic value

The firm was set up by Rod DeWeese and Brian Dougherty, who see their work as being concerned with much more than the material aspects of graphic design, such as paper and print manufacturing processes. They explore deeper issues of behaviour-and attitude-change with designers, businesses and consumers.

The company takes a whole-systems approach to designing. They suggest that designers actively engage with business strategy and marketing plans, so that their conversations with clients are about adding brand value. This attitude allows designers to move away from the traditional narrow ‘green’ graphic designer conversations about papers and print, and their inevitable focus on cost. Celery demonstrates that designers can add much more value than simply recommending a project is printed on recycled paper.

### Designing backwards: avoiding trouble downstream

Celery acknowledges that graphic designers need to ‘avoid trouble downstream’, so they have developed expertise relating to materials, manufacturing and distribution. They emphasize the importance of the designer’s role in managing-out ecological impacts, as by the time a project gets into production its environmental destiny is pretty much determined. They maintain that the best way to address this is for designers to think creatively and ahead-of-time. So, Celery advocate ‘designing backwards’, a process by which designers take a mental journey, starting from a design project’s ultimate destination and working backwards until they arrive back at the design studio.

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The Sustainability Scorecard

The Sustainability Scorecard provides a framework for making informed decisions about a wide range of materials and manufacturing techniques in relation to print. It helps designers to easily visualize multiple competing factors and filter the often simplistic claims of manufacturers. It uses a colour coding system to show the source and toxicity impacts, energy impact and destiny (end-of-life stage) for each material.

This tool is freely available online at [www.celerydesign.com/eco-tools](http://www.celerydesign.com/eco-tools).

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### PLASTICS

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<tr>
<th>MATERIAL</th>
<th>SOURCE &amp; TOXICITY IMPACTS</th>
<th>ENERGY IMPACT</th>
<th>DESTINY</th>
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<td>#1 PET</td>
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<td>Biopolymers (GMO)</td>
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Perfect bind (PVA cold set)
Starch adhesive

### SOURCE & TOXICITY IMPACTS

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<td>Conventional renewable resource</td>
<td>Non-renewable, toxic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewable energy, very low embodied energy</td>
<td>Non-renewable, low embodied energy</td>
<td>Non-renewable, high embodied energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully recyclable or fully compostable</td>
<td>Incineration or mixed</td>
<td>Conventional or hazardous waste landfill</td>
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Celery designed a comprehensive identity for The Natural Step, a non-profit research, education and advisory group that helps corporations and communities move towards sustainability. The letterhead is perforated and scored for easy self-mailing, which eliminates the need for most envelopes.
Hewlett Packard (HP) communicating its innovative corporate responsibility practices
(above)
Over the last five years, Celery has gradually shifted HP’s corporate responsibility report from a single large document to a sophisticated web publishing model. This approach has reduced the printed material from more than 100 pages to 24 and created a family of targeted multimedia communications. Celery’s collaboration with HP has enjoyed widespread recognition, including the Ceres Award for Outstanding Sustainability Report.

Chocolatl packaging: a no-holds-barred eco-solution (above)
This Celery packaging design comprises 100 per cent recycled paperboard box, compostable inner biopolymer bag, no glue, is efficient on the press sheet and is reversible for reuse as a gift box.

Elephant Pharmacy designs (above)
The Elephant Pharmacy chain focuses on natural health and wellness. Celery’s designs aim to appeal to an audience beyond the ‘Berkeley hippy’ stereotype. The hanging signs are made with bamboo plywood and the wall signs are laser-cut plywood with a natural stain. The banners are also made from recycled polyethylene using a printing technique with no solvent emissions.

Design is an attitude not a profession
Interview
Joshua Blackburn

What's your background?

I'm not a designer. I studied Social and Political Sciences in the early 1990s. I founded the ethical communications agency Provokateur in 2002. I learnt the power of design and how to craft effective strategic communications in the social and political spheres working on the 1997 UK general election under Tony Blair’s strategy adviser Philip Gould. I wanted to know more about how to create effective communications campaigns, so I moved on to leading global brand consultancy Wolff Olins where I worked as their specialist in not-for-profit clients. This was from choice, as I didn’t want to work on their corporate accounts. I learnt how powerful advertising, branding and design are to changing attitudes and behaviours.

I write a lot in the (UK) national press and on the Web as well as speaking at conferences, generally agitating on numerous issues such as ‘can design help save the world?’

Why did you set up Provokateur?

My ambition was to create a new kind of agency that would transform the world of ethical communications. I wanted to set up an agency that did work that redefines the rules. Provokateur use the tools of advertising and branding, but apply these commercially proven methods to clients with social and ideological agendas. One thing that advertising people know well is the power of seduction. They recognized long ago that the way to the head is via the heart, and use every device of charm, delight and aesthetic allure to get there. Ethical communications need the same force of attraction.

As Provokateur’s manifesto declares, ‘we hold an unreasonable belief that you can change the world’. We work only with clients we believe in, which is generally a host of environmental, charitable and cultural organizations. We do work for companies, but only ones we like.

Joshua Blackburn
Founder of UK-based communications agency Provokateur

We Want Tap
(Left)
Think globally – drink locally –
drink responsibly – get on tap
Setting up Provokateur has allowed me to instigate our own campaigns, too. We don’t have to wait around for an organization to commission us. Our commitment to being an ‘agency for change’ is reflected in our self-funded enterprises. Our biggest ventures to date are the Acme Climate Action book and ‘We Want Tap’ campaign. We fund, create and launch these self-initiated projects ourselves.

What was the idea behind We Want Tap?

The objective of the We Want Tap campaign was to get people to drink tap water rather than bottled mineral water via a stylish, seductive campaign that would reveal the truth about bottled water and bust the myths about tap.

Bottled water is one consumer product that bears little scrutiny. It consumes precious resources, produces mountains of rubbish, costs a fortune – and all the while drinking water comes out of our taps for free in the UK and many other countries. Bottled water is the triumph of marketing over common sense. To change people’s behaviour, the campaign produced ‘Tap’ products, such as a reusable water bottle and Do-It-Yourself Bottled Water Kit. Profits from sales went towards water projects in the developing world. The campaign really caught the imagination, attracting heaps of press attention and got people talking. It won Best Integrated Campaign at the 2008 Green Awards. We are presently re-vamping the Tap bottle with a Tom Dixon design and taking the campaign to the next level.

And what about the Acme Climate Action campaign?

Acme Climate Action is another self-generated project, but one that uses a different box of design tricks. We worked with the publisher to produce an ‘interactive book’ stuffed with ways of getting the message out there that everyone’s actions make a difference to climate change. It’s less a book, more a loosely bound folder of projects and prompts. It’s designed to be taken apart and utilized. It has stickers for your light switches and home appliances, letters to send to politicians and companies, a home energy audit, labels to reuse your envelopes, postcards to spread the word and loads more. Even the front and back cover are designed to be made into a picture frame. The book is meant to be fun. We believe strongly in utilizing humour to communicate such a serious topic.
1.6 Design innovation and the innovation of design

The designer is 'T-shaped' (below)
A designer can be described as being 'T-shaped', where the horizontal bar of the 'T' represents generalist knowledge and breadth of expertise, and the vertical stem represents specialist knowledge and depth of expertise.
Design is considered by many to be key to innovation, which is in turn considered to be key to economic competitiveness. Policy makers and leading companies alike are committed to design-led innovation, particularly in the so-called creative industries.

Design is also increasingly seen as a key factor in social innovation; that is, innovation that delivers benefits that are not quantifiable solely (or perhaps even partially) in financial terms. Design is a tool for making changes in the world. We should, therefore, keep asking ourselves what (and who) is design for? We should keep innovating design itself.

Specialism and generalism

Increased recognition of the value of design raises the issue of who does design, and how? The profile of any individual designer can be represented in terms of relative degrees of specialism and generalism. The designer is ‘T-shaped’ (see diagram opposite), where the horizontal bar of the ‘T’ represents generalist knowledge and expertise, and the vertical stem of the ‘T’ represents specialist knowledge and expertise.

Specialist expertise is clearly important, yet we should not undervalue the ability to synthesize and integrate specialist expertise with wider overarching perspectives. An emphasis on professionalization can undervalue the often valuable contribution of the non-professional and the amateur (in the best sense of the word). The individual designer can’t hope to be capable in all areas, and so must collaborate in interdisciplinary teams. Wisdom, unlike expertise, is collective rather than individual.

New roles for designers

As design is no longer seen as the exclusive preserve of the professional designer, new roles for designers are emerging. Design is now seen as being too important to be left to the designer alone. We are seeing an opening-up of the practice of design as, through co-design and participatory design approaches, people (not ‘users’ or ‘consumers’) are being involved in the creation of their own design outcomes. New roles are constantly emerging as the designer becomes less a generator of ideas and more a facilitator of the generation of ideas.

“Innovation is the successful exploitation of new ideas.”

Department of Trade and Industry
Competing in the Global Economy: The Innovation Challenge, UK (2003:8)