

Feeding the Lion : One Internal Design Group's Odyssey

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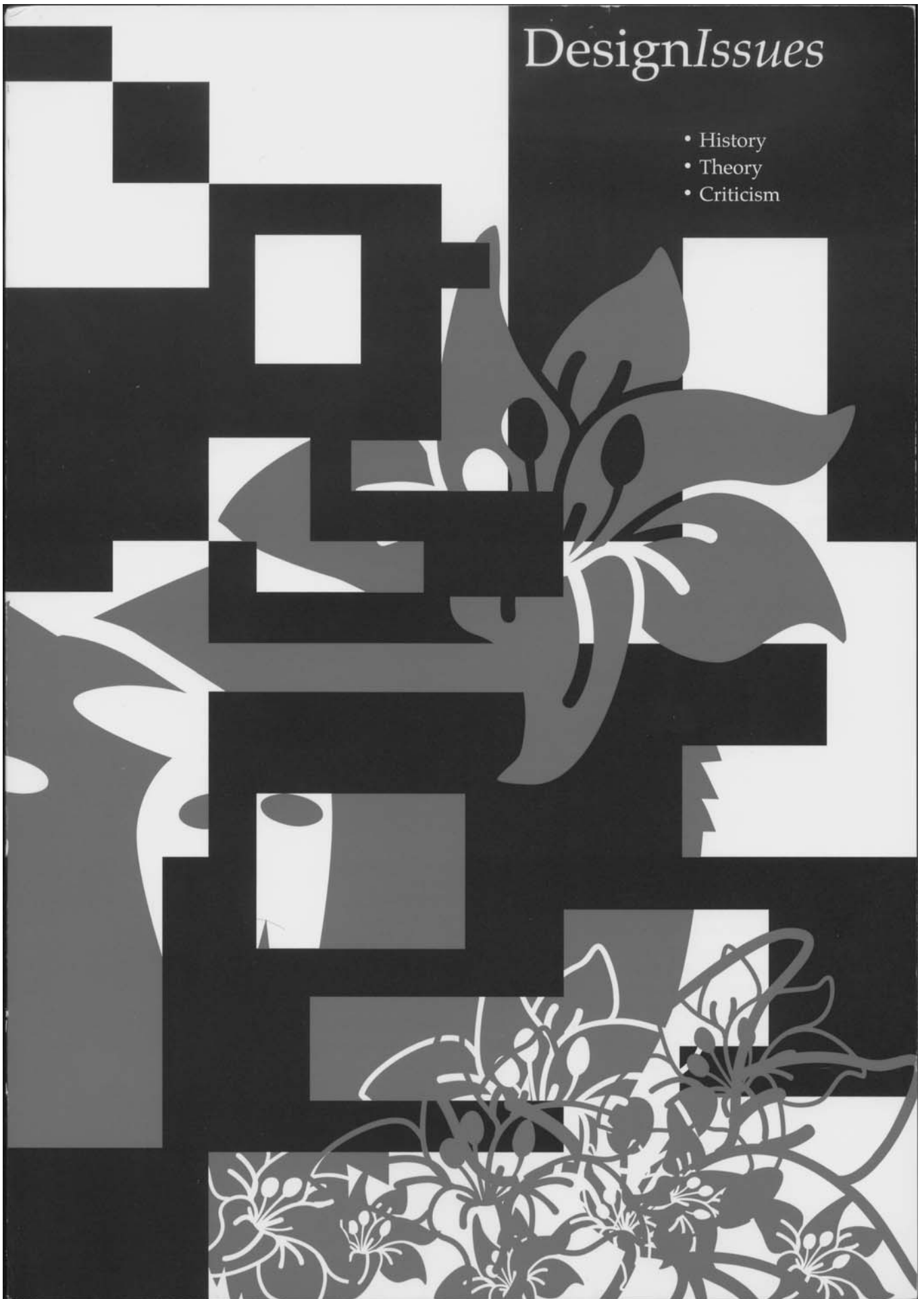


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“Feeding the Lion:” One Internal Design Group’s Odyssey

Adam Kallish

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Premise

In the 1950s, Thomas Watson, the CEO of IBM, said, “Good design is good business.” This forward-looking statement recognized the intrinsic value of graphic and industrial design to IBM, and acknowledged a company ethos that embraced design as one of several critical factors in the success of any business enterprise. Though the validity of Watson’s statement seems obvious, there continues to be a curious reluctance by most corporations to embrace it.

Companies often regard design excellence as difficult to identify, manage, and measure; and not worth the unknown investment or effort. Settling for “just good enough” makes sustaining a good design initiative difficult for any external consultancy that services them. It can make it almost impossible for an internal design group within these companies to do so.

In corporations that provide tangible products—especially in the consumer products sector—internal design groups have had a dramatic impact on their performance and visibility. Nike, Philips, Sony, and Starbucks historically have shown that consistent brand strategies shaped and implemented by internal design groups are possible. The critical difference is that many of these corporations decided to have their internal designers develop the specifications and strategies of design, and then outsource the actual implementation to external consultancies.

More often than not in the non-packaged goods sector, most internal design groups are identified as a marketing support function, generating the myriad communication products that corporations need. Usually reduced to reactive service organs, internal design groups provide “stuff”—a repetitive event to incrementally improve the ideas of the business staff.

There are many examples of internal design groups as amalgams of marketing, graphics, and production units that provide the flotsam and jetsam of corporate ephemera. Like a lion that needs large amounts of food to sustain itself, internal design operations satisfy relentless requests for “product.” While there has been an effort to professionalize internal design groups to the level of an external design firm, it has not been consistent or widespread.

Corporate managers and staff tend to use internal design services with a degree of caution—or to use them with an emphasis on production—because of their perceived lack of creativity.

This perceived lack may be due to internal design groups being relegated to churning out too many small and potentially monotonous implementation projects, while larger, substantive opportunities are outsourced to “creative” agencies. External design firms and consultants such as Landor, Lippincott-Mercer,¹ Enterprise IG, and Chermayeff & Geismar are routinely hired by corporations to develop the brand rationale and corporate visual systems. They complete valued and visible front-end work, structuring an imagistic panorama to help build business brands.

Faced with the prospect of doing hundreds or thousands of mini-implementation projects, design firms usually suggest that a client start an internal design group (if one does not already exist) or hire design professionals to assist the head of marketing in implementing an identity program, and farm projects out to various creative agencies. Internal groups usually are given little or no explanation of the previously developed strategy, let alone being invited to participate in the development process. Once the prestigious external agency is out of the picture, management tends to lose interest because the decision-making process is considered over. Having invested so many resources in the new strategy, management deems it solid enough to work on autopilot.

Another key issue that affects working relationships is the economic structure of internal design groups. Most of them are “allocated” or paid for in advance, and are part of the company’s overhead. Corporate professionals use internal charge numbers to transfer credits from one area to another. The use of financial credits limits the value of design services. To many business professionals, these issues create an incentive to avoid the hassles and perceived lack of talent within internal design groups, and pay for outside creative services.

The internal client/designer relationship has been challenged within professional service-based consultancies, which provide the intangible services of “intellectual capital” rather than traditional packaged goods. As Charles Leinbach of Fitch has stated, “Physical products are relatively fixed in time and place, their utilities readily bought and sold. Product has a harder sound, implying something solid, dependable, reliable. Service implies a process, something elusive, not always satisfying, and never quite finished.” He goes on to say, “The distinction between products and services is losing its meaning because the critical elements of both the specification for a product and the specification for service are the same.”²

While *Business Week’s* “Design Review” has elevated the importance of design to the mainstream business community, its emphasis on product design and design objects may actually limit a

1 Lippincott & Margulies was purchased by Mercer in 1986. This move to purchase a well-known external brand design firm has been one of the few acquisitions by a global consulting firm. Its present name, Lippincott Mercer, is treated as a semi-independent subsidiary, and does the bulk of its work for outside clients. However, the integration of its services is still being experimented with—20 years after it was purchased—and is addressing many of the key issues listed in this article.

2 Charles Leinbach, “Purchasing the Design of Service,” *Design Management Journal* (Winter 1992).

business's understanding of design as a creator of products, rather than as a means to improve business processes and communications which are expressed through media artifacts.

Given the challenges in attitude of corporate cultures and clients, the inconsistent progress of design as a legitimate business function, the lack of a clear purpose of design other than as a service function, and the inappropriate economic models that design groups operate within, one could conclude that an internal design function does not work. What corporations want and expect of design is different than what design firms want, expect, and are willing to provide. For design firms on the outside of the "great fishbowl" of corporations, there are particular advantages in keeping design as an independent and mysterious ingredient.

This article seeks to clarify how creative groups are rationalized, how they are structured, and what services they offer. It also intends to provide clear examples that address operational, service, and client issues.

A Proposition

In September 1994, a respected designer asked the author to join the Communication Design Center (CDC) at Arthur Andersen & Co., SC. The CDC was a twenty-five-year-old internal service group that had begun by providing photographic services. It had then moved into creating specialized slide presentations. By the mid-1980s, it began offering graphic design services, mainly for marketing areas.

At CDC's apex, there were more than fifty-five employees ranging from typesetters, photographers, and presentation graphics specialists to graphic designers placed within five sub-groups. There were three graphic design groups (traditional, print, and packaging), a multimedia group (Internet, digital animation, interface, and CD-ROM development), and a service bureau group (color copies, slide presentations, and small graphics work). Each group had a supervisor to oversee a constant stream of projects and to build client relationships.

Andersen professionals were not obligated to use the services of the CDC. Local office professionals were free to search for their own resources to support business unit activities. Partners, managers, and staff had tenuous working relationships with the CDC because of less than satisfactory results, and a perceived lack of conceptual thinking skills from staff that had a production-based mindset (many, but not all, of the CDC staff had been specifically hired for their production skills). The relationship between the professionals and the CDC had atrophied to the extent that many professionals did not even know that it existed.

The managing partner of the CDC and an external design consultant identified three goals to change this: (1) develop a working relationship with the managing director of firm-wide design for Arthur Andersen; (2) review the structure of the CDC and restructure

it; and (3) provide “marketable offerings” (a former Andersen term that refers to professional activities that customers would see value in and be willing to buy) to the Arthur Andersen marketing group.

The author was told that there were many resources available, as well as the opportunity to learn business methods and processes. Many peers in traditional design firms were wary of such a proposition. To be effective inside a business setting and to be adequately challenged by “uninspiring” projects in a closed corporate culture was impossible. It was considered tantamount to design suicide.

However, in maximizing the potential of design within a business setting, the author was reminded of a quote by Tomás Maldonado (the well-respected design theorist who was involved with the Hochschule für Gestaltung at Ulm in the 1950s and 1960s):

... there is nothing less comfortable than being obliged to exercise an unlimited profession in a world of strictly limited professions; in other words, to exercise a profession whose beginning and end, whose own territory and that of the neighboring profession are unknown. Conflicts, misunderstandings, discordant and troublesome situations characterize unequivocally the daily life of such a profession.³

The author came to terms with the perceptions of outside designers, as well as the ambiguities and inconsistencies of corporate culture and design. The emphasis on learning management consulting values and linking them to design planning, design management, and traditional design activities would be the goal. It also would provide a rare opportunity to look into the client side of the business on a daily basis.

Looking at the “Fishbowl”

In order to understand the complexity of the author’s task, a quick orientation to the structure and organizational hierarchy of Andersen Worldwide is necessary. Andersen Worldwide, SC was a holding company created in 1996 (previously known as Arthur Andersen & Co., SC, created after a 1989 reorganization plan dividing the company into two business units) to maintain a degree of administrative continuity for Arthur Andersen LLP and Andersen Consulting LLP.

The scope and size of Andersen Worldwide and its two business units was impressive. At the end of fiscal 1997, there were more than 100,000 employees in 110 countries, with estimated revenues in excess of \$10 billion dollars, competing for a market of over \$50 billion. The largest professional services organization in the world, it was uniquely run as a confederation of 2,400 partners actively involved in a wide variety of business consulting activities. These

3 Tomás Maldonado, “Industrial Design as an Educational and Professional Problem” in Gyorgy Kepes, *Education of Vision* (New York: George Braziller & Sons, 1961), 124.

ranged from integrating technology within business processes, human capital services, reengineering/co-sourcing, and the then still developing arena of electronic commerce.

A highly entrepreneurial culture, Andersen hired young, bright college graduates (and an increasing number of experienced professionals) to fill a series of shifting roles and responsibilities rather than static job descriptions. They were quickly immersed into a culture that strove to exceed client expectations by linking consulting activities to business strategies through people, processes, and technology. Given their global reach, Andersen methods transcended any culture, yet, where appropriate, incorporated particular regional factors.

Andersen had one of the world's largest intranets. It was one of the first computer laptop cultures that worked wherever its people happened to be—at airports, phone booths, cabs, or client sites. Its content and many of its interactions became increasingly digital in nature, and were stored in thousands of databases. Yet, in Andersen's entrepreneurial zeal to offer a wide variety of services, internal confusion was continually created about how to go to market. Donald Schon, in his seminal book *The Reflective Practitioner* commented:

Each view of professional practice represents a way of functioning in situations of indeterminacy and value conflict, but the multiplicity of conflicting views poses a predicament for the practitioner who must choose among multiple approaches to practice or devise his own way of combining them.⁴

Andersen culture was a complex set of interactions and transactions between a large hierarchy of staff, managers, senior managers, and partners in two areas: the practice (front-line client employees) and practice management (support areas such as marketing, human resources, technology support, etc.). While there was some coordination of activities, most partners and managers were free to grow their respective businesses. The CDC was silently tucked away within this twenty-four-hour backdrop, offering creative services to the thousands of Andersen professionals.

Learning the Ropes at the "Fire Station"

It soon became apparent that the CDC was an organization that moved more according to the firm's immediate needs, rather than by plan. Andersen began to embrace, purchase, and install developing technologies such as desktop computers, a corporate intranet to deliver messages, files, and then many databases. The CDC tried to keep pace by learning appropriate firm software and graphic software that could create and output the communication products business professionals needed.

4 Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 17.

The CDC was both a rich and starved resource. It had an excellent technological infrastructure and very dedicated people, some of whom had been with Andersen for decades. Their high work ethic was deeply ingrained, and staff speedily completed projects of all shapes and sizes over the course of a year—with an innovative bent to some solutions. Overall, most of the work was production based, incrementally improving the ideas of Andersen professionals.

The result of years of added volume and growth created small design sub-groups, servicing specific client bases, or based on media expertise. These groups each developed different project management styles, contributing to a deep and profound disconnected sense of what it took to complete projects. There was little time to reflect on activities as the volume of work fractured processes. The groups' different client bases brought varying levels of quality and consistency of both process and product. A degree of rivalry and protectiveness of each sub-group's client base existed, with individuals relying on their own wits and skills. While there was some interaction between the different sub-groups, it was sporadic and based more on the need for specific skills and staff availability, rather than a clear sense of collaboration.

Time to Adopt, Adapt, Innovate

Approximately one year after the author joined Andersen, the CDC came to a halt due to its inability to recover its costs. The staff size was too large, and their skills were on the decline, or based on technologies that were obsolete. At this point, three supervisors came together and agreed that the current structure had to be changed.

They believed that small design groups divided by medium (print and new media) and service (design and output services) had to be replaced and streamlined into one design group for greater focus and efficiency. They also agreed that the name "Communication Design Center" had questionable equity with its clients from a brand perspective. Thus, its name was changed to "Design Unit" in order to start with a clean slate and to emphasize design as a value-added activity. The author's goal was to link business culture, practices, and processes to both design products (artifacts) and processes (specifications and activities). The rewards to clients and designers could be enormous, and prove that both could coexist in a complementary relationship.

Key staff were identified, and core design services were articulated with a central purpose and methodology. Issues such as "career pathing," salary benchmarking, work-flow, client communications, and billing procedures were reviewed and restructured. The Design Unit slimmed down to a staff of twenty-four (from fifty-five), including designers, producers, and administrators.

The service bureau sub-group was separated to create a point-of-purchase service separate from the Design Unit, which would focus on professional design services. While this weakened the Design Unit initially, growth was dependent on its ability to secure a more progressive client base that could benefit from front-end strategy, leading to better design solutions. It was critical to establish a reputation for strategic thinking, and to move away from a mindset of reactive production activities.

A major transition for the author was to move from a senior design role to that of a design manager. The ramifications of this transition meant more delegation, less involvement in projects, and more emphasis on strategy, business development, operations, and quality control. "Design" was to be viewed as a framework, creating systems and processes as final "artifacts." John Christopher Jones addressed this reality, calling it "designing designing," or creating systems for exploring, defining, and managing design—as well as developing artifacts. The use of design strategy to develop the problem space and specifications for projects became a design problem in itself.⁵

James Woudhuysen, the design futurist, articulated what the Design Unit wanted to secure:

... the futures-oriented coordinator of marketing and design is to research these cognitive and emotional issues and, through a detailed assessment of the likely evolution of their dynamics, draw up an inspired design specification. ... without a design futures perspective, the corporate vision and line management of design can all too often turn out to be superficial, subjective, and perhaps even cynical.⁶

A critical factor was senior management's commitment to these changes, regardless of whatever previous relationships with individual designers had existed. What bound everyone together was the belief that the practice of design transcended any single medium, and was the needed link between content, media, and strategy to tactics. The Design Unit began a proactive marketing strategy of reviewing how it discussed its products and services, retooling its project management processes, and—most important—seeking out former and new clients to position its services and to shape important beginning discussions.

These techniques allowed the Design Unit to learn firsthand about client challenges and operating environments, and then to suggest possible projects. The end result was that many targeted clients were receptive to hear about the offerings of the Design Unit without the immediate pressure of producing high-need, but low-value, "stuff."

5 John Christopher Jones, *Designing Designing* (London: Architecture Design and Technology Press, 1991).

6 James Woudhuysen, *The Relevance of Design Futures* from an unpublished article from James Woudhuysen.

The Role of Opaque Economics

A volatile area for any internal design group is how it charges for its services. Economic transactions play a large role in creating the types of relationships and the value placed upon any service. It also impacts the way an internal design group can go to market, and how independent it can become.

Most professionals operate within an hourly rate—a well-established model within business. Clients, who question the value they are receiving for each hour charged, are increasingly challenging this model. Traditional professions such as lawyers have had to rethink the hourly system because many professions are eroding, and there are more options for the same services and lower fees. There has been a move to value-based billing structures that use the hourly model as a base, but adjusts it to the perceived value of the product or service provided.

Many design groups are embedded through specific business functions within marketing being budgeted in advance and therefore subsidized. Since there is no financial transaction involved, there is difficulty in controlling expectations and the value placed on supplied services. The Design Unit operated as a cost-recovery center, which is based upon only recovering direct fixed and variable costs. Projects were paid for through an internal system of charge numbers, which were deducted from individual corporate budgets. While there are some benefits and conveniences from this system, there are many drawbacks. Many internal clients did not like the idea of providing charge numbers since they felt that they could not “control” the fate of projects. They also expected higher accountability for fees, which resulted in micro-managing activities to the point of increasing project management burdens and increased fees, which could not be recovered.

Ambiguous and ill-defined financial procedures of internal design groups are one of the reasons why companies have closed such groups and outsourced design. A commonly held perception is that design is not part of the business function, or based on a feeling that there is a lack of talent. Further, internal groups are not considered customer focused, and do not have the right skills or limited product/service offerings. The Design Unit aimed to align itself with Andersen client teams working directly for partners and senior managers to strengthen service delivery and increase their client relationships. This also allowed the Design Unit to secure actual outside revenue through a partner’s revenue stream. In any company, the ability to generate outside revenue can never be underestimated.

The Reinvention Experiment

Much of the work the Design Unit secured was through referrals. While referrals are important to building and maintaining a stream of work, a business usually is defined by the person who does the referring. For similar projects, this referral model works. If there is a new type of opportunity, the referral can get in the way of discussing the new opportunity. Referrals placed the Design Unit in a constantly reactive state of responding to ambiguous or erroneous criteria for projects.

Before the Design Unit's creation, the CDC was not viewed by marketing professionals as a viable internal design group, and was not used beyond a traditional implementation function. Early in the Design Unit's restructuring, its fate was still dictated by the needs and perception of marketing. Marketing forces in both business units were continually under siege by their clients, and were in a precarious position of proving their value to a skeptical and—in many cases—unaware business culture that goes to market with or without a marketing plan in mind.

The marketing function at Arthur Andersen in 1994 was traditionally structured, with marketing professionals serving the various industries and offerings of the firm. Andersen Consulting, by contrast, was much more dynamic and in a leadership position based on the principles of integrated marketing (aligning organizational communications with the needs of customers). Marketing staff constantly were being rotated or leaving the firm, budgets were ambiguous, timelines were compressed beyond reason, and, most significantly, marketing professionals still saw design as a commodity of "creatives" providing "stuff," rather than collaborators bringing unique skills to make marketing activities and products valuable.

Rick Robinson, formerly of the Doblin Group and Sapient commented: "Artifacts are not decoded—they are used to make meanings. They don't have meaning, they are given meaning through the ways they are used and experienced. We should not be interested in the grammatical aspects of things, but in their narrative aspects."⁷ Because design functions are defined by creating physical products that are properly packaged in graphic forms, the more valuable planning and strategy services are overlooked, or not valued. Focusing on the formal properties of design, rather than the narrative aspects of design, to create more powerful media solutions limits the potential of design.

While most designers at the Design Unit were frustrated by their interactions with seemingly uninterested or combative corporate clients, they also had a lack of interest (or a lack of experience) in defining front-end problem setting and contextualizing of a client's perceived problem or solution. This reduced discussions between clients and designers to the most stereotypical interactions of skills needed to execute a solution. Robinson further states that:

7 Rick Robinson, "What to Do with a Human Factor," *Human Factors* 1:7 (American Center for Design, Chicago): 66.

8 *Ibid.*, 65.

An object oriented, empirically-oriented approach to design research is incapable of providing an enduring foundation for design practice When you cannot tell clients why one solution is superior to another, you can expect to be relegated to a merely cosmetic role.⁶

It was for these reasons that the Design Unit began to move away from marketing departments as the main user of design services, and went directly to senior managers who controlled projects and initiatives spearheaded by individual partners. This was a major breakthrough that began to show a high degree of success.

The Emergence of the 1 & 0

Many clients approached by the Design Unit were overwhelmed by the communication tasks facing them. This was the result of confusion as to: (1) the specifications for the communication of products/services, and (2) who these communications were for in an increasingly digital environment, where reusability was paramount.

With the explosion and diversification of a wide variety of digital media communications and products, the societal and corporate ramifications have been sweeping and profound. Discreet media (books, magazines, newspapers, cinema, television, and telephones) that had been based on established principles of broadcast have been transformed into a new, digital dynamic of bits and bytes.

At Andersen, this transformation was deep, quick, and profound. Automation was embraced through technology, and anything that would increase individual performance was quickly integrated. The introduction of personal computers, wide area networks, voicemail, intranet connections and, finally, the Internet mushroomed the amount of connectivity, information gathering, and information transfer. Intellectual capital was being created faster than people's ability to understand and use it. Time became compressed into a nonstop, 24-hour workday of easily transferable products. Constant communications created a ubiquitous media-rich environment.

The result was a momentous challenge for managers at Andersen, as well as the Design Unit, to keep up with all the change that was being compressed into pan-synchronous timeframes. This created new levels of complexity and a lack of understanding. Donald Schon, in his seminal book *The Reflective Practitioner*, commented on this phenomena through Russell Achoff, Professor Emeritus at the Wharton School focusing on operations research and systems theory, by noting:

... managers are not confronted with problems that are independent of each other, but with dynamic situations that consist of complex systems of changing problems that

interact with each other. I call such situations “messes.”
Problems are abstractions extracted from messes by analysis: they are to messes as atoms are to tables and charts. ...
Managers do not solve problems: they manage messes.⁹

These transformations had a direct impact on the Design Unit and its offerings. Until the introduction of the new technologies, the Design Unit had a specific lock-hold on proprietary and cost-intensive technologies that Andersen professionals did not have access to. Timelines were much more predictable because the pace of business moved at a rate determined by the technical resources and processes (typewriters, overheads, message centers, etc.) that had not changed for decades. Suddenly, this model became irrelevant.

Communicating, Toolmaking, and Branding

The Design Unit would have become quickly irrelevant if it had continued to provide traditional design services and processes. Whereas the business units had a coherent set of values that were translated by individual operating areas into specific vision and mission statements, the Design Unit struggled to create its statements as an extension of both Andersen Worldwide and design.

Andersen professionals were increasingly able to create their own digital products using off-the-shelf, plug-and-play, and drag-and-drop software. The strategy of Design Unit management was to go back to the basics of design: to use the incredible power that designers have to stimulate things that really matter including new products, new messages, and new information systems, and to do it in a way that’s utterly believable.¹⁰

One result was reviewing all Design Unit staff and their individual interests and skills in order to mesh them into a wider set of shared skills that would facilitate teamwork. Working in small, dynamic teams that interfaced in an entrepreneurial fashion with clients was emphasized where:

At the core of an effective team is what’s known as shared values. If you don’t value the same things, you can be pretty sure that the team will fail.¹¹

More challenging and interesting projects began to be secured once the Design Unit reorganized its processes and values into these teams. Their primary goal was to collaborate with clients by learning their businesses or areas of operation. The Design Unit convinced clients to develop a family of tools and products rather than strings of disconnected projects. Based on client feedback, the Design Unit also reviewed its services and added intranet and Internet development, which was then on the cutting edge of technology. This enabled maximizing messages on initiatives and offerings through a mixture of media and technologies.

9 Russell Ackoff, as quoted by Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 16.

10 Larry Keeley in a panel discussion, “Design in a Changing World: The Challenge Ahead” (American Center for Design, Chicago, 1987): 37.

11 *Ibid.*, 39.

Teams began to look at the total life cycle of product development, from message and positioning issues to distribution and use. These “invisible” issues usually reside outside of the visible range of traditional design processes and product development. True collaboration is based on a relationship of equal partnership, which is difficult for many clients to understand. Clients viewed collaboration as control of project parameters embedded in their corporate culture, which considered design as a docile internal service-oriented activity.

Early Design Unit clients were either caught off-guard—combative or curious about this new approach to providing design services. However, other clients approached the Design Unit specifically because of this change, and utilized its wider offerings. While a large percentage of projects still were rooted in traditional product development in the visible spectrum, the difference was increased professionalism and efficiencies, which resulted from retooled Design Unit processes and a focus on collaboration with clients.

This transformation did have its share of problems in terms of convincing designers and clients alike that these changes were both necessary and valuable. Designers believed in the idea of working in teams, but needed help deciphering front-end problem setting and becoming cross-media focused. Emotionally, they struggled with traditional design markets stressing single-media tangible products and being a power-of-one resource. Designers usually have not been interested in addressing these new spectrums, because of their focus on product development and former lack of being included in the front-end specification setting.

Many designers are looking to practice design differently in order to keep up with changes in how design is defined and delivered. These changes are redefining the value clients have placed on an increasingly collaborative process with designers. Other graphics groups within Andersen languished in an ambiguous purgatory of high-need/low-value “stuff”—with no end in sight. Clients that came to the Design Unit from these non-integrated groups began to comment that its approach provided the needed value and integrity for well-developed intellectual capital products.

Defining New Patterns

One might conclude that business and design are, at worst, incompatible, or, at best, relegated to constant confrontation. In a world of downsizing and outsourcing to increase profitability and competitiveness (with little regard for relationships), design services of all types are challenged to maintain their value past a single project. What internal design groups have that external design groups do not is an understanding of the corporate culture—its opportunities, limits, and excesses, as well as an understanding of how corporate professionals work and the products they specifically need. The

Design Unit had to develop an understandable proposition to convince internal audiences. This was accomplished, in part, not by looking to design, but by looking at the world of consulting services, and superimposing the principles and values of design on it.

Larry Keeley of the Doblin Group has been an advocate of redefining design as a strategic resource to advance business objectives. He has stated that:

... designers can work wonderfully with business people when they understand that the core of the disconnect is the business person's natural skepticism about what might happen in the course of the relationship, and the business person's confusion of the designer's role¹²

What's missing is the realization that design services can help create integrated tools and products for a full range of business professionals. What's needed are seasoned design professionals within corporations who are willing to put aside the traditional perceptions that design is a noble, yet misunderstood, profession and who are willing to become entrepreneurs, taking the limitations of corporate culture and using it as a tool to package design services and products.

The Design Unit tried to achieve what Charles Leinbach referred to as "a maintainable advantage" which "usually derives from outstanding depth in selected human skills, logistics capabilities, knowledge bases, or their services strengths that competitors cannot reproduce and that leads to a greater demonstrable value for the customer." He goes on to state: "Success derives from individuals who are comfortable and content all along a continuum from hard skills to soft knowledge, and whose interests lie in optimizing the whole result, even if doing so subordinates his or her specialty."¹³

The author was forever changed by exposure to management consulting environments, technology integration, and an emphasis on processes and systems. One could identify analogies to the Roman army, and the emphasis on the centurion, engineering, and discipline. The transformation of the Communications Design Center into the Design Unit at Andersen showed the possibilities of design being practiced within a corporation as a consultative and planning role, and an artifact-making role by design. It also showed the limitations of what design could do in a business that is not about design at all—that design, if it is to embrace the larger strategic role, has to prove itself in an unforgiving environment with many smart people. This led the author to merge strategic design thinking with well-crafted media artifacts that amplified the value of intellectual capital.

Unfortunately for many designers, there continues to be little shared packaging for these ideas, and a wide variety of wildly divergent interpretations and applications of design management, design methods, design planning, and other forms of strategic design. One

¹² Ibid, 36.

¹³ Charles Leinbach, "Purchasing the Design of Service," *Design Management Journal* (Winter 1992).

of the biggest opportunities and monkey-wrenches for the use of design services has been the increasingly interconnected digital world that is transforming traditional media products.

Addressing the challenges and successes of operating a design group within the fishbowl of a major corporate partnership, Andersen Worldwide, SC was a challenging and sobering experience that highlighted how far and fast design could transform itself from a production service to a value-added resource for practice areas that served clients. The slow rise of Andersen as a global consultancy, which began in earnest after World War II, and its quick implosion in 2002 due to the Enron debacle was a somber chapter of the limits and liabilities of the erosion of sound business values of professional consultancies. The Design Unit, like all other areas, was deactivated and strewn to the four winds; closing an interesting seven-year experiment in upgrading design services in a demanding business environment.

The challenge for internal design groups is to create a catalytic range of offerings, and to provide the needed analytical and creative talent and skills to convince corporate professionals to use their services. The experience of the Design Unit was to learn as much about prevailing corporate culture; look to best practices by integrating particular corporate initiatives and language; to “design” services; and finally move beyond the obligation contract of production to one of providing deeper value.