

Making Strategic Design Work

*Creating Space for **Design** and **Business** to Meet as Equals*

Master Thesis Strategic Product Design
Delft University of Technology

Julia Dubbelman
May 2025

Strategic Product Design
Delft University of Technology

Master Thesis

Making Strategic Design Work: Creating Space for Design and
Business to Meet as Equals

Author

Julia Dubbelman

Chair

Dr. Giulia Calabretta

Mentor

Emile Mazerant, MSc

Date:

05.05.2025

Preface

I am grateful for the opportunity to write this thesis on a topic I am truly fascinated by. To put it in Schön's words: I really have had a reflective conversation with the situation. What felt intangible at first, slowly became clearer. Now I look back on a process that was not only fun, but also full of learning.

My thanks go to all the people who have supported me throughout this journey.

Giulia, thank you for your thoughtful feedback, kind words, and for giving me the space and encouragement to shape this thesis in a way that truly suited me.

Emile, thank you for your honest feedback, your willingness to always help and the way you challenged my own frames.

I also want to thank my dear friends and family who were there for me and gave some much-needed distractions, laughter and perspective along the way. Especially Andries; thank you for always keeping me grounded. And to my parents: thank you for always being there with your endless support.

I am also very thankful to those who participated in the interviews and validation sessions: thank you for your time, your input, and the valuable insights you shared.



Summary

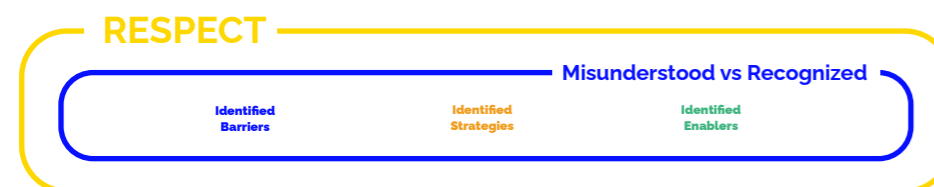
This thesis explores the friction between strategic design and business contexts. This friction has been experienced by the author and later echoed by many other designers in interviews and conversations. While organizations increasingly recognize the need for creative approaches to tackle complex challenges, the integration of strategic design remains difficult in practice. To better understand this phenomenon, two research questions were posed:

RQ 1: Why does strategic design often struggle to become integrated in organizations?

RQ 2: What can be done to make strategic design work within organizational realities?

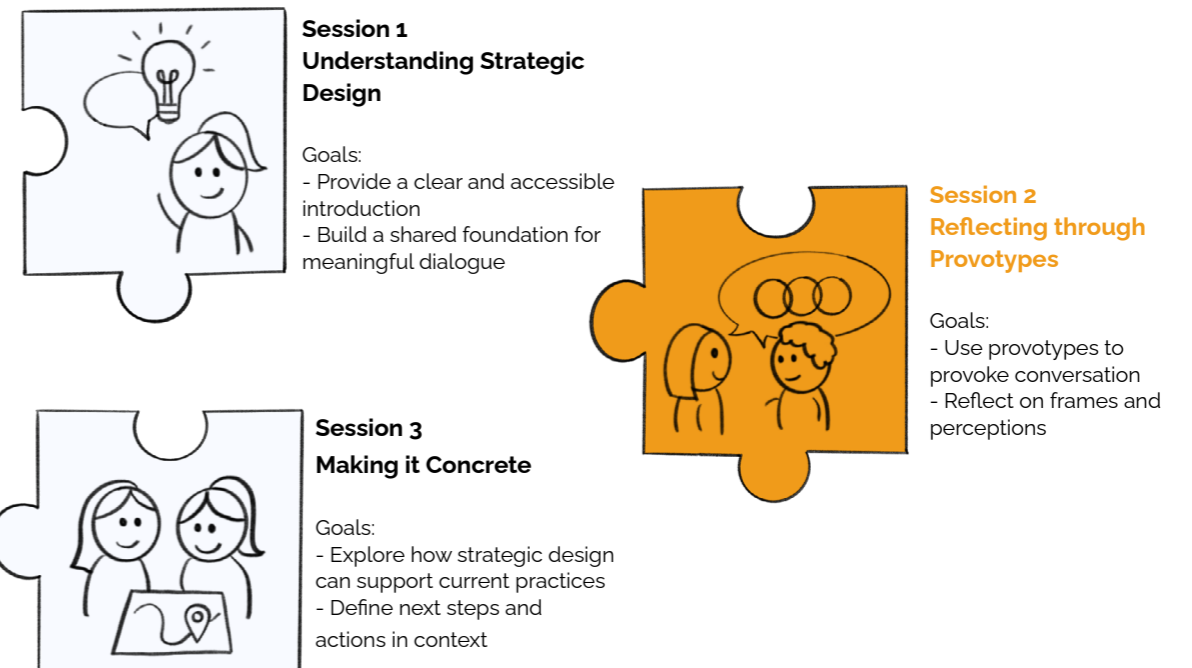
To answer these questions, the thesis combined a literature review, a qualitative research approach, and a design intervention. The literature review revealed that strategic designers operate through a distinct reasoning style: the abduction-2 logic. This allows designers to reframe problems and navigate complex, 'wicked' problems. This way of thinking can expand the problem-solving arsenal of organizations. However, models such as the CK-theory and the IDER model highlight that innovation can not be embedded unless an organizational context itself evolves. This insight reframes the role of the strategic designer: not as someone who brings the innovation, but as the innovation itself.

The interviews revealed that designers often struggle to position themselves within rigid structures and face misconceptions about the nature and value of their work. Four recurring tensions were identified: rigidity vs. flexibility, misunderstood vs. recognized, evidence vs. intuition, and exclusive vs. inclusive. Each was linked to an underlying value, trust, respect, empathy, and equality, which form the foundation for successful collaboration between design and business.



Based on these insights, a design intervention was developed: an interactive workshop with prototypes, designed to trigger reflection and dialogue at a strategic level. The goal was not to transfer knowledge, but to create space for mutual understanding, reflection and reframing. Two validation sessions showed that the workshop evoked rich and reflective conversations, but also revealed a lack of shared understanding of strategic design. As a result, the concept was redesigned into a three-part workshop series: starting with building shared understanding, followed by reflection through prototypes, and ending with translating insights into action.

This thesis contributes to the field by repositioning the designer as an additional strategic force: the innovation itself. It also emphasizes the importance of organizational readiness. Practically, it offers a tool for strategic designers and business professionals to meet as equals. Ultimately, making strategic design work means looking beyond tools or roles, and focusing instead on openness, shared values, the co-creation new ways of working.



Contents

Preface	3	4. Data Analysis	30
Summary	4	4.1 The 'Formal' Way: Atlas	31
1. Introduction	10	4.2 Creative Qualitative Analysis	31
1.1 Personal Motivation for this Thesis	11	5. Results	32
1.2 A Universal Problem?	11	5.1 Value Tension 1: Rigidity vs Flexibility	34
1.2.1 Initial Interviews	12	5.2 Value Tension 2: Misunderstood vs Recognized	36
1.2.2 Initial Literature Study	12	5.3 Value Tension 3: Evidence vs Intuition	38
1.2.3 Relevance of the Topic	12	5.4 Value Tension 4: Exclusive vs Inclusive	40
1.3 Project Aim	13	5.5 Bridging the Gap: Overcoming Tensions through Overarching Values	42
1.4 Project Approach	14	5.5.1 Bridging Tension 1 through Trust	42
2. Theoretical Background	16	5.5.2 Bridging Tension 2 through Respect	42
2.1 Design	17	5.5.3 Bridging Tension 3 through Empathy	43
2.1.1 Design and its Evolving Role	17	5.5.4 Bridging Tension 4 through Equality	44
2.1.2 Strategic Design	17	5.6 Intersection of Values	44
2.1.3 Design as Distinctive Way of Problem Solving	18	6. Solution Space	46
2.2 Design and Business	19	6.1 From Input to Design Requirements	47
2.2.1 Today's Challenges	19	6.3 Interaction Vision	48
2.2.2 The Business Value of Design	19	7. Design Development	50
2.2.3 Design Maturity	19	7.1 Brainstorm and Concepts	51
2.2.4 The Role of Contexts: C-K theory and IDER-model	20	7.2 Prototyping: Theory	51
2.2.5 What is the Innovation? Or Who?	21	7.3 Final Design Output: Workshop with Prototypes	51
2.2.6 Different Interpretations of Design	21	8. Design Solution	52
2.2.7 Strategic Design meets Business Thinking	22	8.1 From Insights to Intervention	53
2.2.8 Business Strategy versus Strategic Design	22	8.1.1 Target Audience	53
2.3 Business	23	8.2 Prototypes	53
2.3.1 A Framework for Challenges: The Cynefin Framework	23	8.2.1 Prototype 1: The Book	54
2.4 Conclusion	24	8.2.2 Prototype 2: The Poster	55
3. Methodology	26	8.2.3 Prototype 3: The Optical Illusion	56
3.1 Research Approach	27	8.3 Workshop Format	57
3.2 Participant Selection	27	8.4 Validation Sessions	58
3.2.1 Titles and Roles	27	9. Validation and Analysis	60
3.2.2. Organizational Context	27	9.1 Validation Focus	61
3.2.3 Recruitment Strategy	27	9.2 Analysis per Workshop Element	61
		9.3 Analysis of Surveys	66
		9.4 Main Lessons Learned	66
		9.5 Possible Redesign	67

10. Conclusion and Reflection	70
10.1 Conclusion	71
10.2 Theoretical Implications	72
10.3 Practical Implications	72
10.4 Limitations	72
10.5 Personal Reflection	72
Sources	74
Appendix A: Interview Guide	78
Appendix B: Code Groups Resulting from Descriptive Coding	79
Appendix C: Clustering Process	80
Appendix D: Evaluation of Brainstorms	82
Appendix E: Prototypes	83
Appendix F: Survey Questions	85



Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Personal Motivation for this Thesis

The motivation for this thesis started at the end of my bachelor's when I took the course Entrepreneurial Innovation by Design. It was my first real experience of the business world, the terms, the models, the structures. Until then, I had only worked with creative and like-minded peers, but this course opened my eyes to the web of processes, departments, strategic decisions, ivory towers and politics that shape large companies. It wasn't just an innovation team with a plan, and an operational team executing it. There was so much more beneath the surface. It was a whole new world to me, and I knew I wanted to explore it further. That's why I started my master's program in Strategic Product Design.

To get the full picture, I decided to do an internship in a large company to gain real-world experience. My goal was clear: I wanted to get out of my designer bubble and experience how people who don't use design think and work. I also had a mission: I wanted to bring design to places where it wasn't already; I wanted to be a design advocate. Specifically, a strategic design advocate, because for me, design isn't just about making beautiful things, it's beautiful way of thinking.

A few months later, I started my internship at a large company abroad. It was an amazing, valuable and an eye-opening experience. The most impactful part? Realizing how completely lost I felt as a designer. This sentence I wrote in my diary at the time sums it up perfectly:



Jan 27th, 2024:

"I will keep it short, because I have almost finished my coffee. But I have graduation-inspiration. I realize that I am losing myself a little, in the work, in the company. I am not aware of my design-power, the subject I have been studying for six years.."

I realized that if I ever wanted to thrive in this kind of environment, I would have to choose between dedicating the rest of my masters to understanding this topic and my own role as a strategic designer, or expecting to face the same struggle over and over again. And since you're reading my thesis right now, it's obvious which choice I made.

The starting point for this thesis is the doubtful situation I experienced during my internship. A doubtful situation; because I am not yet able to pinpoint where the sting is. What I do know, is that my colleagues were great, the work was interesting, and my overall experience was invaluable. But while I was so excited to bring strategic design into the corporate world, they don't seem to be friends. Yet.

1.2 A Universal Problem?

The motivation for this thesis arose from a situation where strategic design and business did not seem to be aligned, as described earlier. However, before starting the project, interviews and informal conversations were conducted to determine if this was a universal problem among strategic designers. To write a thesis of relevance, it's important not to rely solely on one experience.

1.2.1 Initial Interviews

Three interviews and two informal conversations were conducted with SPD alumni. Three of them had worked in the field for several years, the other two shared experiences from internships or gap years. All five recognized the struggle and recognized the tension between design and the structure of large organizations. One interviewee commented:

“Yes, super relevant and very recognizable. I also run into the same challenges, it’s definitely a topic worth researching. Especially now that design is becoming more acknowledged as a discipline within larger companies.”

Another designer mentioned:

“But the structure of a big company and the division into departments and teams often makes it impossible to act outside of it. You’re subjected to the hierarchy and structure you’re in.”

Three of them expressed feeling misunderstood in their roles, and that design was often seen as just visual or aesthetic work:

“It felt a bit like they thought we were graphic designers. You’re an industrial designer, so you can draw well, right? Sketch a little. The technical stuff, they knew all about that.”

The strategies they had developed to create space for themselves were also discussed:

“So yeah, I did find a way that works for me. I’ve created that space for myself”

1.2.2 Initial Literature Study

Alongside these conversations, a first literature review confirmed that this friction between design and business is not new. There is a growing body of literature on this topic. Mainly because over the last decade, design and design thinking have been recognized for their contribution to business and management. Many successful companies have adopted design thinking as core working principle, because of the growing appreciation of the potential impact of design and the increasing popularity of design in the business sector (Brown & Katz, 2009; Matthews & Wrigley, 2017).

Research indicates that organizations that use design perform better in the market place and gain increased competitive advantage (Sheppard et al., 2018b; Brown & Katz, 2009; Cross, 2023; Dorst, 2011). However, while design thinking has gained popularity, many authors also point out that its adoption in business contexts is not always successful or sustainable. These challenges and misalignments are further explored in the theoretical background section of this thesis.

1.2.3 Relevance of the Topic

It can be concluded that the doubtful situation experienced during my internship is not unique. Other designers have faced similar challenges and developed their own

strategies to overcome them. Furthermore, the extensive body of literature on this topic shows how design and design thinking continue to shape and contribute to the field of business and management. Therefore, focusing on this topic is not only something I am passionate about and eager to explore further, but it also has the potential to provide valuable insights that could benefit others facing similar challenges.

1.3 Project Aim

The starting point for this thesis is the phenomenon experienced by myself and other designers: strategic design often struggles to be absorbed into business practice. The aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon through a literature review and qualitative research, and to develop a design output that bridges a gap between design and business.

To guide the exploration, the following research questions are posed:

Research Question 1:

Why does strategic design often struggle to become integrated in organizations?

This first research question focuses on the core phenomenon as it is perceived and experienced by designers. As the underlying causes of this struggle are not yet defined, the goal is to uncover why and how this challenge arises in practice.

Research Question 2:

What can be done to make strategic design work within organizational realities?

The second question builds on these insights and explores how strategic design can take root more effectively. The aim is to identify opportunities that support its meaningful integration, and to use these insights as input for the design output.

1.4 Project Approach

The approach for this thesis is structured according to the Double Diamond framework, as shown in Figure 1. This method was chosen because it provides a structured yet flexible framework that gives clear guidance, while allowing for deep exploration and iterative improvements through the diverging and converging stages.

For the research part of this thesis, a phenomenological research approach was chosen, because this thesis seeks to understand an experienced issue in practice. The main characteristic of phenomenological research is its descriptive nature: it seeks to understand what the experience is and how it is perceived by those involved. This approach required the researcher to set aside their own assumptions and combines literature with observations and conversations from practice (Ho & Limpaecher, 2022).

The first diamond, the problem space, focuses on exploring the problem. This was done through three iterative loops of information gathering and synthesis. Each loop had a distinct focus. The first loop (green) focused on the intersection between business and design. The second loop (orange) zoomed in on the designer's experience and mindset. In this phase, interviews with designers were conducted. The final loop (blue) focused on the business perspective. Each iteration led to insights and new questions. The problem space was closed with the formulation of a design statement, which marked the transition to the solution space.

The solution space focuses on the development of the design output. This phase was also iterative, involving brainstorming, concept development, and two validation rounds. This thesis concludes with recommendations derived from the validation results.

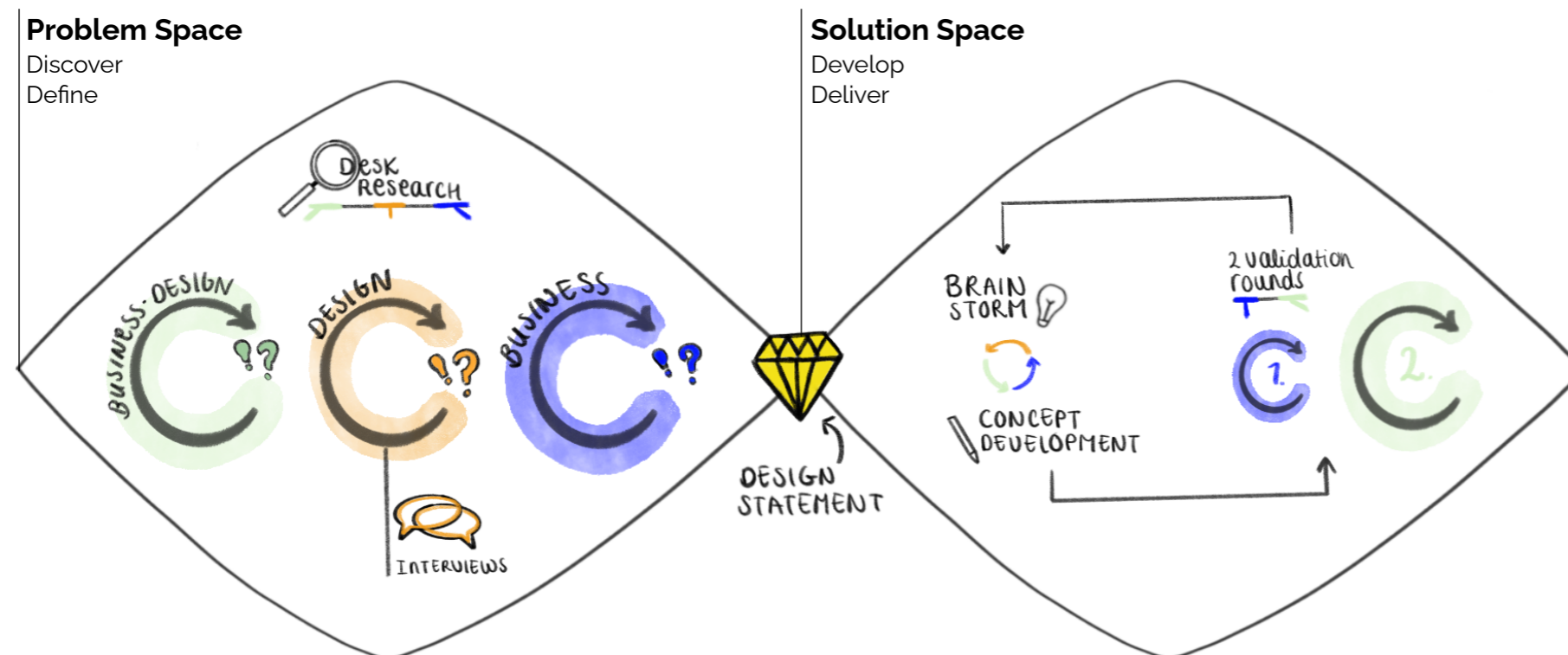
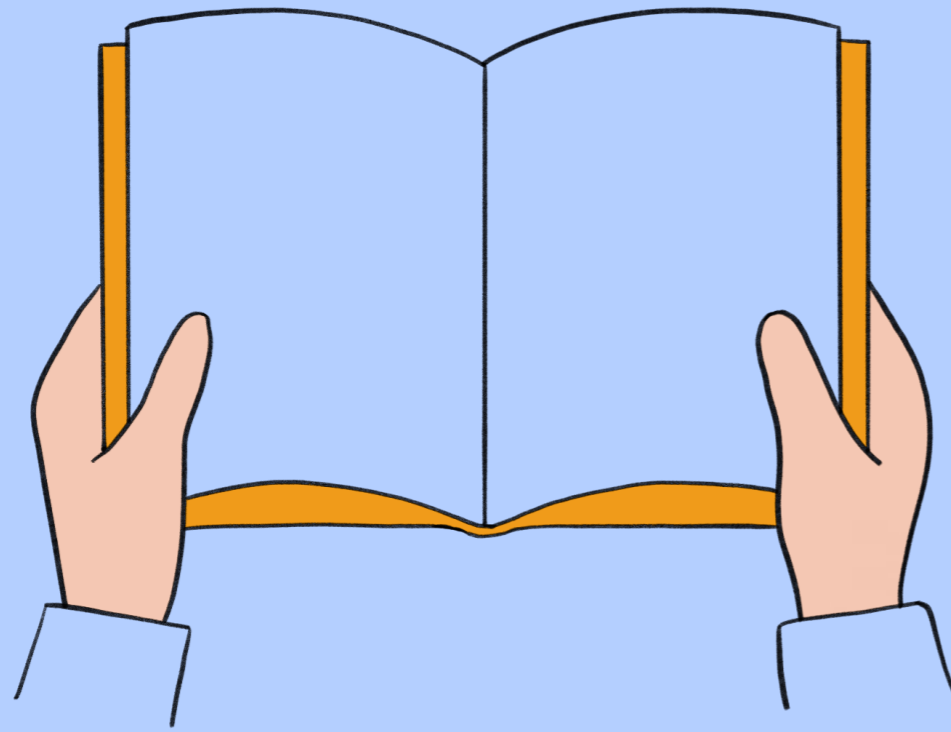


Figure 1: : Project approach according to the Double Diamond framework



Chapter 2

Theoretical Background

This theoretical background aims to explore RQ1 by understanding why strategic design struggles to become integrated in organizations, and also reviews current literature to identify factors that enable successful integration (RQ2). The literature study is structured in three parts: first, it explores the field of design and the reasoning behind designerly practices. Second, it focuses on the integration of design within business contexts, and third, it elaborates on the business domain itself.

2.1 Design

This part of the literature study focuses on the domain of design. It explains the evolution of design, the rise of systemic and strategic design and it dives into the underlying way of reasoning of designers.

2.1.1 Design and its Evolving Role

Before exploring the meaning of strategic design, the core topic of this thesis, it's important to take a step back. Not all the way back to the beginning, because about two million years ago, *Homo habilis*, also known as "Handyman" is believed to have been the first maker of tools, which could be seen as the first form of product design (Chetan-Welsh, 2023). The term industrial design was first used in 1839, and between 1850 and 1900, design became recognized as a real profession. From the 1980 onwards, the demand for industrial design increased and many design consultancies were formed (Goldense, 2019).

At the same time, the scope of design has expanded. It has evolved beyond the creation of products, and to include levels such as interaction design, experience design, and more recently, in 2020, design has moved to the systemic level (Voûte et al., 2020). On this level, design addresses complex (societal) challenges through a deeper understanding of interconnected systems (Van Der Bijl-Brouwer & Malcolm, 2020). Here, design is seen not just as a problem-solving tool, but as a strategic approach to solving complex problems (Cross, 2023).

2.1.2 Strategic Design

This thesis is part of the master's program Strategic Product Design, a program which also operates on this systemic level of design and focuses on merging design and management disciplines to create innovative and future-proof strategies (MSC Strategic Product Design, n.d.).

But what exactly is strategic design? According to Calabretta et al. (2016), strategic designers use their way of thinking, methods, and tools to influence the strategic decision making within an organization by balancing the three lenses of desirability, feasibility and viability. Strategic design projects often deal with a high level of uncertainty because they are centered on shaping the future (Calabretta et al., 2016). Strategic designers bring both the mindset and a toolbox to navigate these complex challenges, and that's why strategic design is adopted as key element in strategy making nowadays (Björklund et al., 2020).

There is also literature available exploring the skills of (strategic) designers. Cross, for example, in his book 'Design Thinking: understanding how designers think and work' (2011) describes how designers approach problems. Based on several case studies, he elaborates on the mindset and reasoning approaches of different types of designers. In the book 'Strategic Design', Calabretta et al. (2016) extends this literature by specifying the capabilities of strategic designers. Van Arkel and Tromp (2024) emphasize that, although there is research into the capabilities of designers, clearly articulating what they can contribute remains a challenge. They identify four skills that designers can use to contribute to societal challenges: integrating, reframing, formgiving and orchestrating.

2.1.3 Design as Distinctive Way of Problem Solving

As design has expanded beyond the field of product development, it is increasingly being used as an approach to solving complex problems where conventional problem-solving methods often fall short, and a different kind of reasoning becomes essential (Brown & Katz, 2009). In the next section, the reasoning approach behind this distinctive way of problem solving will be elaborated.

Dorst (2015) argues that design is not just about generating solutions, but is centered on a designer's key ability to create new approaches to a problem situation. This process is also known as "framing". A frame is "a cognitive map that influences how we perceive, interpret, and evaluate a situation, informing our goals, behaviours, and actions within that context". Frames determine for us what we see as quality, our goals, and our behaviours. In short, our actions make sense within our own frames (Mazerant & Van Der Bijl-Brouwer, 2024). A designer's ability to actively frame problems highlights a fundamental difference in the approach to problem solving. To better understand how problems are approached, Figure 2 examines different forms of reasoning (Dorst, 2015).

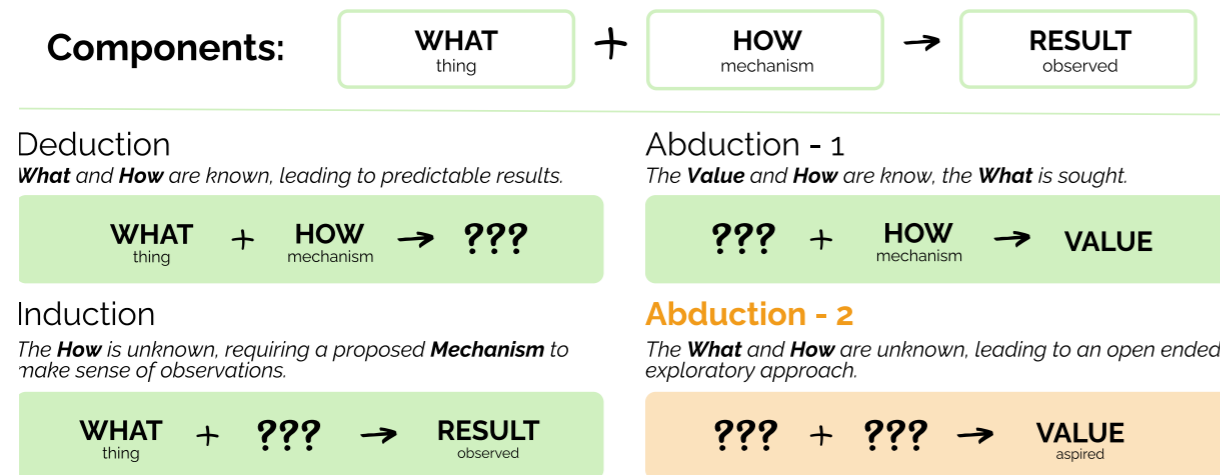


Figure 2: Different forms of reasoning, adapted from the book "Frame Innovation: creating new thinking by design" (Dorst, 2015)

The way a designer thinks is closely related to abduction-2, which is useful for tackling complex problems, because with abduction-2, a new frame is actively sought. This approach requires a designerly mindset characterized by an openness to ambiguity, the willingness to suspend personal judgement, and a readiness to experiment and learn on the fly (Dunne, 2018, Cross, 2011). By adopting new frames, new and innovative solutions can be found that conventional problem-solving methods might overlook (Dorst, 2011, 2015).

In contrast, most decision-making in business environments typically follows models based on deductive and inductive reasoning. This usually consists of analyzing the available data, comparing the alternatives and selecting the most logical option (Koziol-Nadolna & Beyer, 2021). This difference in reasoning reveals an important tension: while designers actively seek new frames through abductive thinking, many businesses use reasoning methods based on existing frames. The next section explores why this

creative, frame-shifting way of thinking finds its way into organizations and businesses and the challenges that arise when it meets conventional logic.

2.2 Design and Business

Design has long played a role in business, mainly through tangible forms of design such as graphic design or product development. However, the scope of design, also in the field of business and management, is gradually shifting towards a more strategic application. This growing demand is reflected in the acquisition of design consultancies by large firms, such as the takeover of product design and innovation agency VanBerlo by Accenture in 2020 (Verrijt, 2020), or the acquisition of design agency Lunar by McKinsey & Company in 2015 (Wilson, 2015). These trends signal a growing interest in embedding strategic design capabilities within organizations.

2.2.1 Today's Challenges

The world in which organizations operate today has become increasingly complex and uncertain, also because of the influence of a growing number of interrelated factors and stakeholders (Brown & Katz, 2009; Dunne, 2018; Koziol-Nadolna & Beyer, 2021). Many of today's challenges are described as 'wicked'. This term was introduced by Rittel and Webber (1973) and refers to problems that are open-ended, multifaceted and deeply interconnected. To solve these kinds of problems, conventional, linear problem-solving methods often fall short, because the nature of wicked problems requires a more open and exploratory approach that allows for reframing and redefinition throughout the process (Dorst, 2015). Or as Schön (1983) described it, a 'Reflective conversation with the situation' is needed, an ongoing process of framing and reframing through action and feedback.

This is where design, and specifically strategic design with its abductive reasoning approach, offers an alternative. As Dunne (2018) notes, design thinking has emerged as a promising approach to help organizations innovate, navigate through uncertainty and address wicked problems. Designers are trained to embrace ambiguity and manage complexity through iterative methods (Dorst, 2015; Cross, 2011; Björklund et al., 2020). This capacity makes strategic design increasingly attractive in today's fast-changing world.

2.2.2 The Business Value of Design

As outlined earlier, strategic design enables organizations to reframe challenges and generate innovative solutions in a world of increasing complexity. Businesses are recognizing that their current problem-solving capabilities may not be sufficient to tackle wicked problems. To stay competitive, many organizations are turning to a design-led approach to problem solving to enhance their resilience to change and adaptability (Giri & Stolterman, 2022; Wrigley, 2013). A report by McKinsey found that companies with strong design capabilities outperform their competitors in terms of revenue growth and stakeholder returns (Sheppard et al., 2018). Similarly, research shows that adopting design thinking contributes to competitive advantage by supporting innovation, value creation, and adaptability (Martin, 2009; Brown & Katz, 2009, Björklund et al., 2018).

2.2.3 Design Maturity

The role of design has evolved from a product-focused discipline to a strategic way of thinking that is increasingly embraced by businesses for its ability to manage complexity

and gain competitive advantage. However, not all businesses utilize design in the same way. Design maturity models can be used to better understand how design is applied in different business contexts.

One such model is The Danish Design Ladder (Figure 3). Developed by the Danish Design Council, the ladder categorizes different levels of influence design can have within a business (Doherty et al., 2014; Storvang et al., 2014). For companies, moving up the design ladder is beneficial, as research by Kretzschmar (2003) shows a correlation between a higher ranking on the ladder and a better business performance.

This thesis centers on step four of the ladder: design as strategy. At this level, design is used as distinctive way of thinking to navigate through uncertainty, in order to complement existing business strategies. However, the integration of design in this level is not straightforward. To understand why, it is important to take a closer look at the role of the organizational contexts.

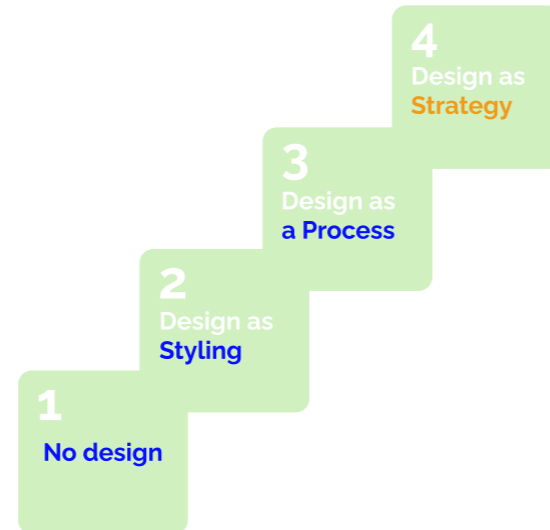


Figure 3: The Danish Design Ladder

2.2.4 The Role of Contexts: C-K theory and IDER-model

Although the Danish Design Ladder shows the different level at which design can be integrated into a company, it does not explain why some forms are more easily absorbed than others. Tangible forms of design are often well understood and established, while more abstract and strategic forms of design are often harder to embed in business practices, as became evident during the internship and interviews.

To better understand this absorption challenge, the C-K theory, developed by Hatchuel and Weil (2003) offers a useful theory. The theory combines design theory with problem-solving theory and describes innovation as an interaction between two spaces: the Knowledge space (K) and the Concept space (C). The K-space represents what is already known, a space of propositions with a logical status. The C-space is where new ideas are generated (Figure 4).

The “Design square” (Figure 5) illustrates how a concept originates in the K-space, moves into the C-space to be developed (disjunction), and ultimately returns to the K-space to be adopted (conjunction). In order for the concept to be accepted, it

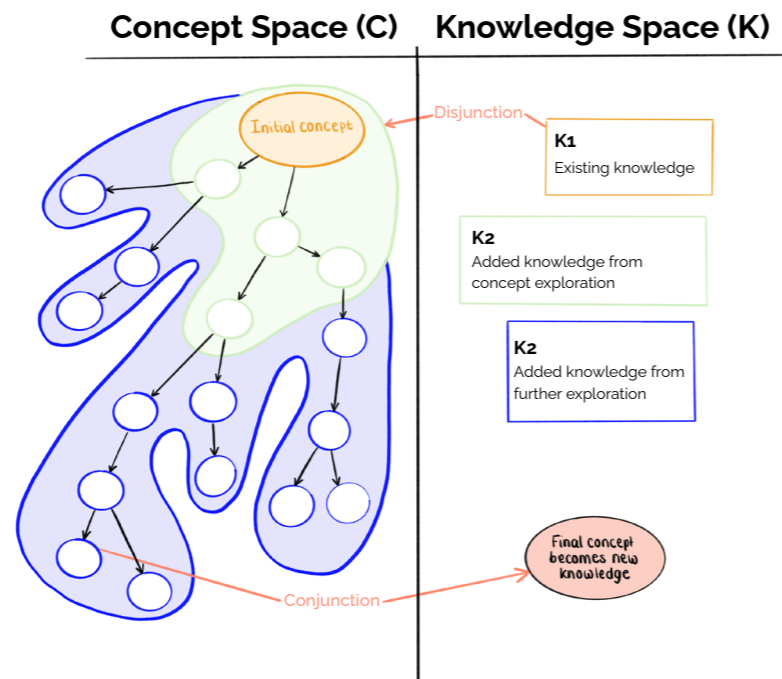


Figure 4: The C-K model (Hatchuel & Weil, 2003)

might also require changes within the K-space itself, or at least the recognition that one’s current frame shapes how problems and solutions are perceived. In other words: for an innovation to be absorbed, it must reshape the reality of the whole organization. If the existing propositions and frames in the K-space remain constant, the concept is likely to be rejected, misunderstood or undervalued.

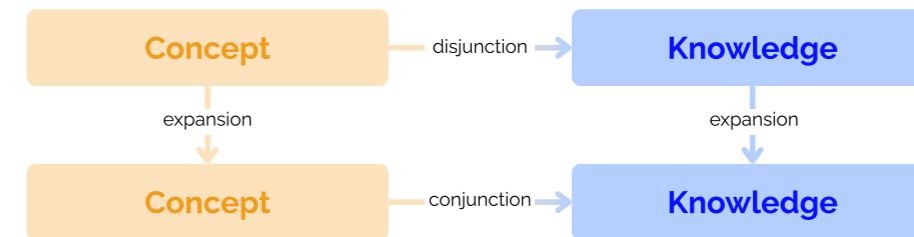


Figure 5: Design Square (Hatchuel & Weil, 2003)

This insight also became evident in the study by Smulders (2014). He describes that the context in which design is applied needs to be taken into account because it plays a critical role in determining the success of the design effort. Impactful design is not only the act of designing, it requires attention to the stages before and after the design process itself. Thus, applying design into non-design fields involves much more than focusing purely on design, design thinking and the tools and methods used. It requires a holistic approach where the whole context needs to be taken into account. This provides a key insight for answering RQ1 by underscoring the critical role of the broader organizational context in the integration of strategic design.

2.2.5 What is the Innovation? Or Who?

From this perspective, the integration of strategic design depends on the readiness of the organization to evolve its own context. The C-K model is used to explain the innovation process, but what if we apply it to the presence of the strategic designer in an organization?

If strategic design introduces a fundamentally different way of reasoning, working and framing problems, then the designer is not only bringing the innovation: the designer is the innovation.

In this case, whether a strategic designer becomes fully embedded in an organization and whether the organization is able to reach the fourth level of the Danish Design Ladder, depends on the organization’s K-space. It’s all about their current context: their existing frames and mental models. In other words, a concept will only ‘stick’ if the context in which the new concept is introduced is able, or willing, to evolve with it. Understanding In the following sections, literature is reviewed that explores why this evolution is often difficult.

2.2.6 Different Interpretations of Design

The use of design, and its underlying approach Design Thinking, has gained popularity in business and management since the 1950s as a new problem-solving skill (Cross, 2023). Cross, who wrote a book on the topic of design thinking (2011), observed that this term was used so often, that it nearly lost its meaning. In a later paper, in 2023, he emphasized

that the term “design thinking” as applied in business and management differs from the “design thinking” referring to designerly practices. The word “design” is often used as a term for creativity, but holds much more depth. Therefore, Cross introduced two types of design thinking: design thinking 1 (DT 1), referring to the deep designerly practices of the designer and DT 2, referring to a more superficial form of design that involves creativity methods and can be learned through a workshop or short learning module (Cross, 2023).

Voûte et al. (2020) describe this rise of design thinking in business as a “mixed” blessing: it increases appreciation for design methods, but it also oversimplifies them. This gives the illusion that design can be done solely with the well-known yellow post-its in an afternoon session.

The application of this distinction plays an important role in this thesis. DT2 can be seen purely as a creative method, in which case it can be easily adopted within the existing organizational context and applied on demand. In contrast, DT1, often challenges underlying assumptions and therefore requires a reframed K-space for this way of thinking to be fully embedded. When organizations are not aware of this distinction, they may believe that they are “already doing design”, while remaining at the DT2 level and missing the strategic potential that DT1 can offer. According to the competence learning model (Burch & Gordon, 1974), such organizations could be considered as unconsciously incompetent. They are unable to embed strategic design, but also unaware of the value they are missing.

2.2.7 Strategic Design meets Business Thinking

Several studies have explored how design thinking and business logic aligns, or clashes. It has become evident that it’s no plug-and-play solution and to understand why, it is important to consider the underlying values of both domains.

The study of Björklund (2020) shows that there are frictions between the approaches of designers, and those of engineers and managers. Her research shows that these frictions can be mitigated by combining a broad understanding and a deep expertise of design, meaning that there should be widespread design knowledge, and experienced designers. In other words, both DT 2 (widespread knowledge) and DT 1 (design expertise) is needed.

Furthermore, design, by nature, is holistic, iterative and the intuition of a designer plays a big role (Cross, 2011). Yet, business strategy is often built around efficiency and hard data is important to back-up decisions. Lafley and Martin (2013) define strategy as an integrated cascade of choices, whereas design is about the creation of something new. These differences in emphasis and prioritization reinforce the need for contextual change.

2.2.8 Business Strategy versus Strategic Design

Although the presence of design practices in business has grown rapidly, its connection to the field of strategy remains underexplored. Sobel and Schweitzer (2022) note that, while managers are increasingly adopting designerly ways of working, there is still limited understanding of how strategic design can be effectively leveraged within traditional strategy practices.

Watson and Dorst (2023) also investigate the link between design and strategy and

introduce the Game Changer Model (Figure 6) as a useful lens to understand how design can influence strategy. The model highlights the interaction between top-down strategy making and bottom-up design interventions. It shows that design becomes impactful when it contributes not only to solutions, but also changes the field in which strategic decision making happens, the field in which problems are defined. For design to operate at this strategic level, it must influence how problems are framed, how decisions are made and how organizations perceive their own context. This way, design and strategy are not separate forces, but part of a two-way dynamic: strategy provides direction and boundaries while design actively challenges and redefines them.

This idea aligns closely with the C-K model as described earlier: strategic concepts can also be absorbed if the K-space evolves as well. Without this transformation, there is a risk that design becomes to be a surface-level tool (DT 2), which can be applied on demand, without truly challenging existing frames and driving long-term, strategic change.

2.3 Business

This thesis elaborated on how a designer’s way of thinking is applied to create new and innovative frames as problem-solving approach for complex problems. This capacity can be added to a business’ toolbox and used when necessary. This section explores when it would be beneficial for companies to make use of this design capacity.

2.3.1 A Framework for Challenges: The Cynefin Framework

Organizations have always dealt with challenges that needed to be solved, however, as discussed in the previous paragraphs, the nature of these challenges is evolving. Today’s problems become increasingly wicked. It is essential to recognize that not every problem requires the same approach. The Cynefin framework, developed by Snowden and Boone (2007), offers a useful overview to differentiate between different types of problems and the strategies that can be used to solve those (Figure 7). The model defines five different contexts: obvious, complicated, complex, chaotic and disorder.

In obvious contexts, solutions are straightforward. The relation between cause and effect is clear to everyone. Complicated problems require more investigation, but the knowledge to solve the problem is already available. Expert analysis is required, which is why consulting firms often operate in this domain. The complex area is different: the relationship between cause and effect can only be understood in hindsight. There is no clear path forward, potential solutions must be explored through testing and

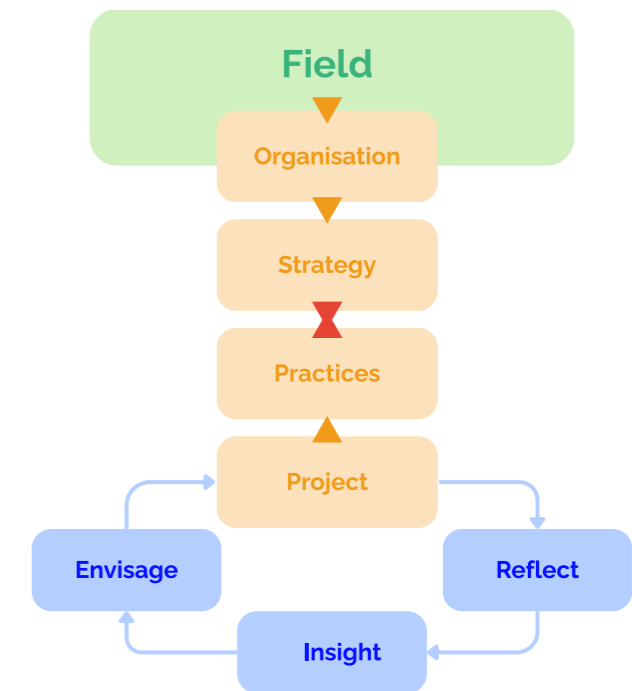


Figure 6: Game Changers Model (Watson & Dorst, 2023)

evaluation. This is where strategic design comes into play. Designers offer real value in this context, due to their ability to apply abductive-2 reasoning, which allows them to reframe challenges and explore futures that do not exist yet. This is a crucial skill when navigating complexity (Van Arkel & Tromp, 2024).

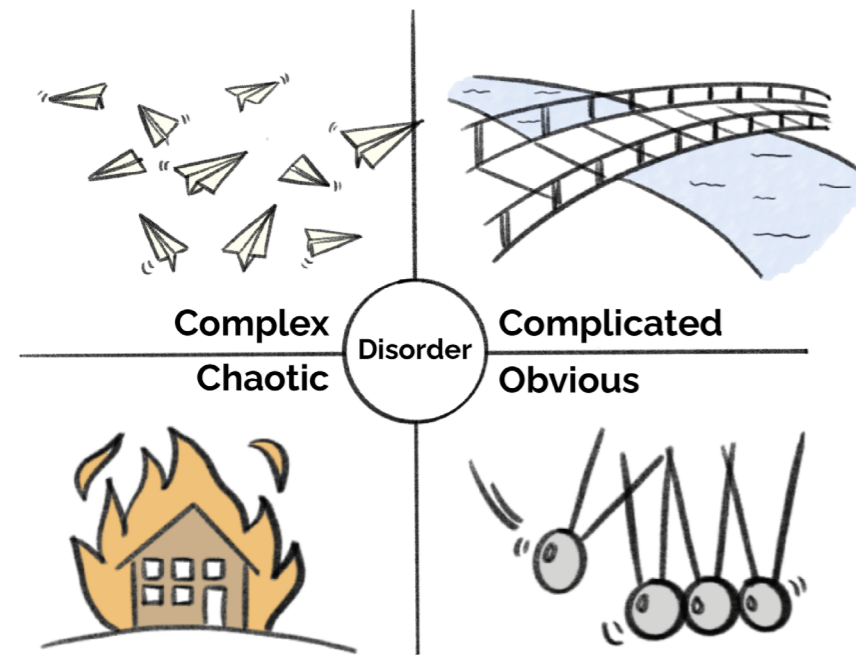


Figure 7: The Cynefin framework (Snowden and Boone, 2007)

Furthermore, chaotic situations require immediate action before a sense-making process can begin and the domain of disorder represents ambiguity. Here, it is unclear in which domain the problem belongs (Snowden & Boone, 2007; (Froeling, 2024).

In short, this framework helps an organization to think about the nature of the problem before choosing how to act. It shows that strategic design does not answer every type of problem, but when problems are getting complex, it can offer meaningful value.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided insights into the role of strategic design and the reasons why it often struggles to integrate within organizations (RQ1), highlighting the importance of the wider organizational context. It has also explored the conditions under which strategic design can successfully take root (RQ2), such as an organization's ability to adapt its context and assess the nature of the problem to select the most appropriate reasoning approach.

Below, a summary of the main takeaways is provided:

- ▶ Design has evolved beyond its traditional role of product development and now addresses complex, strategic challenges.

- ▶ Designers use abduction-2 reasoning to challenge existing frames and uncover new ones, enabling innovative solutions that conventional problem-solving methods often overlook.
- ▶ In a world characterized by increasing uncertainty and complexity, organizations turn to this distinctive way of thinking to navigate change and remain resilient.
- ▶ Yet, strategic design often struggles to stick within organizations. The C-K theory and the IDER model illustrate that successful integration of innovation depends on the surrounding context's capacity to evolve alongside it.
- ▶ In this light, the strategic designer does not bring the innovation, the strategic designer is the innovation. For this innovation to take hold, the organizational context must be willing and able to evolve.
- ▶ Different types of problems require different approaches, according to the Cynefin model. Strategic design is valuable in situations where problems are complex.
- ▶ The potential of strategic design and its ability to 'stick' is closely linked to an organization's ability to reflect on its own context. When this awareness is present, design can unlock better solutions, novel frames and future-facing innovations.



Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter approaches RQ1 and RQ2 from a practical perspective by investigating how strategic design is applied and perceived through interviews with design professionals. It describes how the participants were selected and how the data were gathered. The methodological choices are grounded in the theoretical background outlined in Chapter 2.

3.1 Research Approach

The research follows a phenomenological approach. An important part of this approach is to set aside personal prejudices and assumptions and engage directly with those who might also experience the phenomenon (Ho & Limpaecher, 2022). Therefore, in order to understand how strategic design is applied and perceived in practice, semi-structured interviews were conducted with design professionals working in the field. Their experiences provide a valuable insight into how strategic design is put into practice.

3.2 Participant Selection

3.2.1 Titles and Roles

This study focuses on strategic design as a distinctive way of problem solving, which aligns at the fourth step of the Danish Design Ladder. Therefore, the ideal participants were design professionals working at a strategic level, who apply design not only as aesthetics or a process, but as a mindset to shape decision-making. The job title 'Strategic Designer' was considered ideal, however, titles alone were not considered a reliable indicator of the participants actual role. Design is interpreted and labelled differently in different organizations, and the way people perceive design or design thinking also varies due to the diverse and disjointed nature of the term (Bouwman et al., 2019). Therefore, people with titles such as strategic designer, service designer, and business designer were included. In addition, one UX designer and one project manager were selected because their roles were also strongly aligned with the strategic design principle. All participants were actively practicing design.

3.2.2. Organizational Context

The preferred organizational context was a corporate context, as it was in line with the purpose of the thesis. However, during the search, this criterion was broadened and the decision was made to include designers working in a (design) consultancy firm as well, as they also have experience working for corporate clients.

In addition to the type of organization, it's also important to consider how the designer is connected to the corporate context. In table 1, an overview of the interview participants is shown. The last column indicates how the designer is connected with the organization. The orange dot represents the designer, and the blue dot represents the business. Two types of connections are identified: internal designers, who work within the company, and connected designers, who collaborate closely with the company but are externally positioned, for example in a consultancy firm. The connected designers that were interviewed were not employed by the company but were involved in projects over a longer period of time, and were therefore embedded in the organizational practices. This distinction is important because it could influence how strategic design is applied and perceived by the designer.

3.2.3 Recruitment Strategy

Participants were recruited through a personal LinkedIn message, which included a 45-seconds recruitment video explaining the context and purpose of the research, as well as the question to participate as an interviewee. The video-based approach was chosen as a unique and engaging way to recruit participants without the need for a text-heavy message.

Originally, the idea was to include both designers and their non-design colleagues to gather a broad perspective on how strategic design is perceived and applied in practice. However, due to scheduling challenges, only designers were interviewed. This underscores the need to integrate the non-design perspective in a later phase of this research. In total, 13 design professionals were approached and 9 of them agreed to participate. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interview guide can be found in Appendix A.










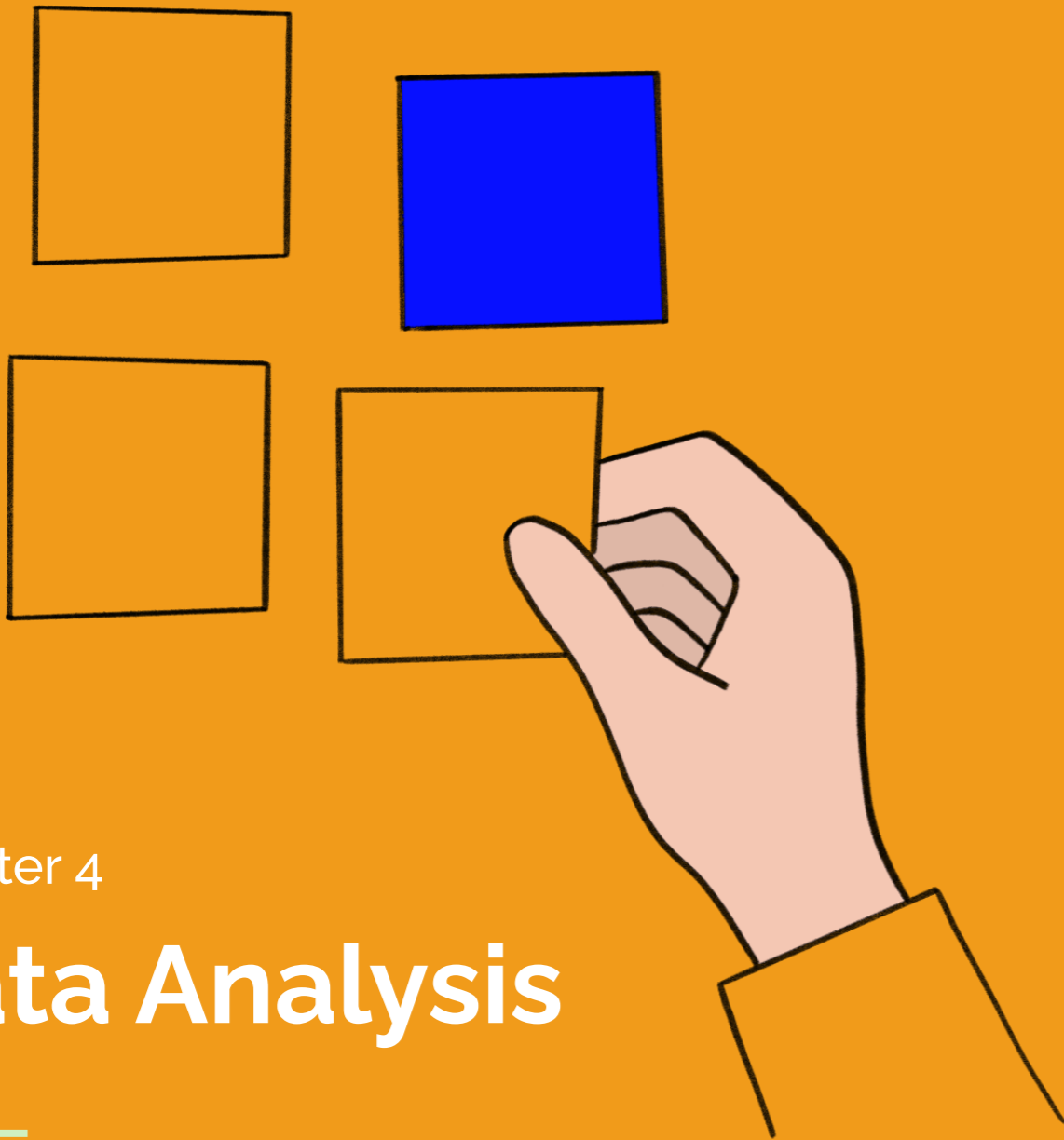
Participant	Title	Company	Type of designer
1	Business Designer	Business Models Inc.	 Connected
2	Product Manager	ING	 Intern
3	Service Designer	PostNL	 Intern
4	Sr. Service Designer	PostNL	 Intern
5	Service Designer	Essense	 Connected
6	Service Designer	PwC	 Intern
7	UX Designer	Sogeti	 Connected
8	Project Manager	Bopinc	 Connected
9	Strategic Product Designer	Nationale Nederlanden	 Intern

Table 1: Overview of interview participants

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

The interviews were conducted and transcribed with the help of AI. The goal of the data analysis was to identify reoccurring themes and topics. The analysis followed two approaches. First, a structured coding process was done in Atlas, according to the six-step model of Clarke and Braun (2013). Second, a more intuitive qualitative analysis was conducted to uncover deeper insight. This section explains both methods.



4.1 The 'Formal' Way: Atlas

The six step model of Clarke and Braun (2013) was used as method for coding and analyzing the data. After an initial familiarization process, a first round of descriptive coding was done using the interviews. This resulted in 255 purely descriptive codes. These codes were refined and clustered in Miro, leaving 85 codes, which were used to analyze the rest of the data. The next round of clustering resulted in 22 code groups. These can be found in Appendix B.

This structured method ensured deep familiarization with the data and provided a clear overview of the interview content. However, to make the step from code groups to themes and move beyond the surface-level to uncover new perspectives, a more creative approach was applied.

As a result of this coding and clustering process, it is important to highlight that this data is more design-oriented than business-oriented, which was expected, given that all participants were designers. A key insight was the presence of a business blind spot among designers. Many lacked business knowledge, which could further amplify the gap between design and business. This insight underscores the importance of gathering validation from a business perspective further in the research process.

4.2 Creative Qualitative Analysis

The purpose of the second phase of the analysis was to dive deeper into the underlying patterns in the data. To give this process a clear direction, five key questions were formulated based on the interview guide and the preliminary findings:

- 1) *What does strategic design look like in practice?*
- 2) *What (organizational) barriers or enablers do strategic designers face?*
- 3) *Which strategies are used to overcome organizational barriers?*
- 4) *How do designers and non-designers collaborate?*
- 5) *Which strategies are used to overcome frictions in collaboration?*

To analyze the data in relation to these questions, quotes from the interviews that addressed one or more of these questions were gathered and analyzed in Miro. A clustering exercise was then conducted using those codes, printed on small cards. The focus was on categorizing the findings into barriers, enablers and strategies. During the analysis, it became clear that the questions 2 & 3 and 4 & 5 were closely related, because many of their quotes could be used interchangeably. To streamline the process, these questions were merged.

In total, 15 barriers, 8 enablers and 13 strategies were identified. In the final stage of the analysis, the focus shifted to identifying tensions and overarching themes in the barriers, enablers and strategies that were found. This analysis led to the identification of 4 tensions and 4 overarching values. Appendix C provides an overview of the clustering process and the results.



Chapter 5

Results

In this chapter, the results of the qualitative data analysis are described. Four value tensions were identified, as a connection was found between the barriers and enablers. The strategies represent ways in which designers can overcome these barriers. The following section explains the four value tensions and elaborates on an overarching value framework, which serves as a mechanism to address these tensions.

The following pages visualize the four value tensions identified through the interviews. Each spread covers one tension and includes quotes, key insights, and the strategies designers use to navigate them in practice.

In Section 5.5 – Bridging the Gap: Overcoming Tensions through Overarching Values, the four tensions are revisited and connected to deeper values that can help close the gap between design and business.

This page was left blank intentionally.

5.1 Value Tension 1: Rigidity vs Flexibility

The first tension revolves around **rigidity** vs **flexibility**: the challenge of balancing a strong foundation and shared language within the company, ensuring consistency and efficiency, while also allowing for the iterative and holistic nature of design. One designer noted:

*"(*about design*) we don't always use it to its full potential, and I think that's because, at some point, as an agency, you also want to establish a certain foundation with standardized phases".*

At the same time, design requires flexibility, and a process tailored to a project's specific needs.

Rigidity vs Flexibility

Barriers

Little freedom & flexibility

Rigid business processes

Busy schedules: lack of time, collaboration and communication.

The barriers identified in this tension are:

- (1) Little freedom & flexibility
- (2) Rigid business processes
- (3) Busy schedules: lack of time, collaboration and communication.

All three clusters focus on the fact that businesses are driven by efficiency, so processes are often standardized and rigid. There's little time for exploration and flexibility. One designer mentioned:

"In large companies, things often move quite slowly".

Furthermore, when multiple stakeholders have different objectives, it can hinder the design process:

"There are a lot of partners involved, and that just makes everything take much longer. And that means you can do fewer of these kinds of design sprints".

Strategies

Just do it

One should be held within its power

Designers also mentioned strategies they deploy to create more flexibility for themselves. One of them is the (1) **Just do it** – method:

"It's better to ask for forgiveness than for permission".

Here, the freedom is actively taken up by the designer. Another strategy is to highlight that (2) **one should be held within its power**. By clearly defining roles and responsibilities, teams can allow more autonomy and freedom within a structured process.

Enablers

Freedom

What designers value, is the **freedom** to explore and adapt their approach. They need this freedom to thrive in what they do:

"I feel very satisfied that I have the freedom to conduct brainstorming or create prototypes."

"As a service leader, you clearly indicate what is needed at each stage, and full freedom is given for that. I have never been overruled."

5.2 Value Tension 2: Misunderstood vs Recognized

The second value tension focuses on how design is perceived and understood within organizations: is the strategic potential of design **recognized**, or is it **misunderstood** and possibly reduced to something more superficial (DT2)? Unlike tangible forms of design, such as graphic design, strategic design is often abstract and harder to define:

"You can't easily explain strategic design in just one sentence"

"It's just that, yeah, it's not concrete enough for me to clearly explain 'this is what I do.'"

Many designers also avoid the term 'design' to prevent misunderstandings:

"I notice that I'm hesitant to call myself a service designer, or even to use the word design at all, because it's often associated with making beautiful things."

Misunderstood vs Recognized

Barriers

Strategic design is seen as unclear

Use, but no expertise

Buzzwords: Terminology has landed, but no use

Design seen as a 'nice bonus'

The barriers in this tension are:

- (1) Strategic design is seen as unclear
- (2) Use, but no expertise
- (3) Buzzwords: terminology has landed, but no use
- (4) Design seen as a "nice bonus"

Many designers emphasize that design is often associated with

"making things look better" or "making logo's, things like that".

This also relates to barrier (2) and (3), where design terminology and methods are known but not, or not properly, applied. In cases where they are used, expertise is often missing, resulting in limited impact:

"The Double Diamond is a useful framework in itself, but I do think that many people simply copy the Double Diamond into their slide deck and essentially create a regular project plan. In that case, it sometimes just becomes a gimmick."

"In many large companies, the terminology has landed, but what it actually means varies quite a bit".

Lastly, some interviewees also indicated that design is not always taken seriously:

*(*about Lego Serious Play*) "It is often seen as just a fun little activity for the afternoon."*

Strategies

Create common understanding

Avoid the word "design"

Having an open attitude

The first strategy used is (1) **Create common understanding**, which involves making design more visible and widely recognized within the company. This can be done top-down by embedding design into organizational practices:

"Within the company, there is positive attention for customer journeys and service blueprinting."

Another way is by ensuring design expertise is embedded in the company:

"It's simply important to have a designer within your company; otherwise, it just doesn't work".

Another strategy is to (2) **avoid the word "design"**. Many designers prefer to introduce design methods, without explicitly calling them 'design', making them more approachable:

(about learning programs for employees) "The term 'design thinking' doesn't appear in that program, but the methods used do originate from it."

Lastly, designers mention that (3) **having an open attitude** enables them to build connections and collaboration, without pushing design:

"It's often about sensing how you communicate, how you talk to each other, and whether you even talk to each other at all. Then I can see how we can create connections."

Enablers

Common understanding

The enabler identified is **Common understanding**. Many designers mentioned that they experience more freedom when colleagues are familiar with design approaches:

"There are roles that are more open to it; they are also more familiar with it".

This familiarity creates an environment where designers can thrive, allowing them to apply design to its full potential.

5.3 Value Tension 3: Evidence vs Intuition

The third tension focuses on the **evidence**-based nature of business versus the **intuition**-driven nature of design. The literature also supports this distinction. According to Cross (2011), the problems and solutions are often interwoven and designers often report their ability as based on intuitive and unconscious ways of thinking. At the same time, business prefer data-driven decision making to reduce risks.

Evidence vs Intuition

Barriers

Designers lack business knowledge

Designers mentioned that they see themselves as experts of the design process, but they also feel like they lack business knowledge leading to barrier **(1) designers lack business knowledge**. Additionally, they note that design projects often lack supporting data, making it difficult for organizations to integrate them, as organizations see data as a driving factor:

"Everyone knows it's a good idea, but you can't substantiate it with hard data, which makes it difficult to realize such a project."

Strategies

Collaborate with data-driven roles

Use data as "glue"

Try to understand the business more

To address the barriers, several strategies can be applied. The first one connects with the enabler: **(1) collaborate with data-driven roles**. This way, data collection and analysis are linked to design activities.

"The combination of data and design is very important. What you often see as well is that a business analyst is also involved."

Another strategy is to **(2) use data as 'glue'**. If a data-driven role is involved, this strategy is easier to apply. However, if not, designers should still recognize the business's focus on data and find ways to connect their ideas to measurable insights. This aspect also connects with strategy **(3) Try to understand the business more**. An experienced designer mentioned that designers focus heavily on understanding the end-user, but sometimes neglect their own 'end-user':

*"The deeper involvement on the business strategy side is, strangely enough, completely absent [...] Sometimes, you have to go along with such a decision (*a decision based on costs*). That's often very hard for a designer to accept."*

Enablers

Design as option: demand for a creative approach

The enabler found in this tension is **(1) Design as an option: demand for a creative approach**. Designers mention that they experience a growing demand for creative approaches:

*"We are increasingly being approached for complex issues"
"Clients are also increasingly asking for a design-driven approach".*

This suggests that, while designers may not be the best at generating hard business data, their strength lie in creating and problem-solving. To maximize their impact, they should be positioned where their expertise is needed, while other roles, such as a business analyst can support with the data-driven aspect.

5.4 Value Tension 4: Exclusive vs Inclusive

This tension revolves around the perception of design as an **exclusive** field, something only for designers, versus the goal of making design an **inclusive** and accepted approach.

Exclusive vs Inclusive

Barriers

Design positioned as solution for everything

The primary barrier found is (1) **design positioned as solution for everything**:

"People got a bit tired of it because it was preached as the solution to all problems."

This reinforces the idea that design is something exclusively for designers, making it inaccessible to others:

"Design is often kind of a designer's party".

This exclusivity contradicts important values of design itself, such as co-creation, gathering feedback and involving different perspectives.

Strategies

Avoid the word "design"

Don't isolate yourself as a designer

To overcome the barriers in this tension, two strategies are applied. The first one (1) **avoid the word 'design'**, can also be used here. By introducing design principles without labeling them as such, non-designers may be more open to adopting them.

Furthermore, (2) **don't isolate yourself as a designer**, is mentioned as strategy to prevent reinforcing an exclusive imago:

"You want to make sure that you position yourself on the same boat as a team. Don't isolate yourself as a designer"

Enablers

Design as option: demand for a creative approach

Design as a universal, accepted approach

At this tension, the same enabler as previous tension was chosen (1) **design as option: demand for creative approach**. Additionally, as second enabler emerged: (2) **design as a universal, accepted approach**. Some interviewees mentioned that design is increasingly recognized as a universal approach, widely accepted by clients. This enabler positions design as one approach in a broader toolbox of problem-solving methods:

"Our clients accept our proposals and pay us, so in principle, they consider our approach to be good. [...] I think our approach is a kind of universal approach that is generally seen as good."

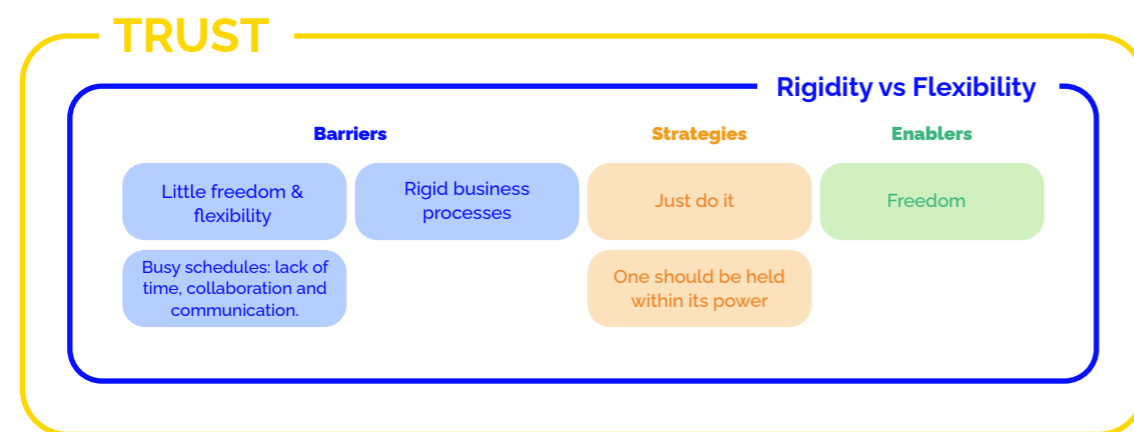
5.5 Bridging the Gap: Overcoming Tensions through Overarching Values

To bridge the tensions that are identified, it's important not just to focus on adopting strategies, but to look at the deeper values that connect both fields and shape the way people think and work. Values are beliefs that guide and motivate our actions, and they influence how we look at the world. Values also shape the frames within which our actions make sense (Holmes et al., 2011). As described in the theoretical background, frames determine how we perceive the world around us and what we see as valid solutions. It is often within these frames that the root of the problem lies, and where the path to resolution can be found.

Therefore, to uncover opportunities for alignment, we need to shift our focus from the operational level to the underlying values and frames. This creates space for collaborative solution finding, where both sides can explore new possibilities together, beyond the limitations of existing frames. Below, an overarching value is posed for each tension, offering a foundation for bridging the gap between design and business.

5.5.1 Bridging Tension 1 through Trust

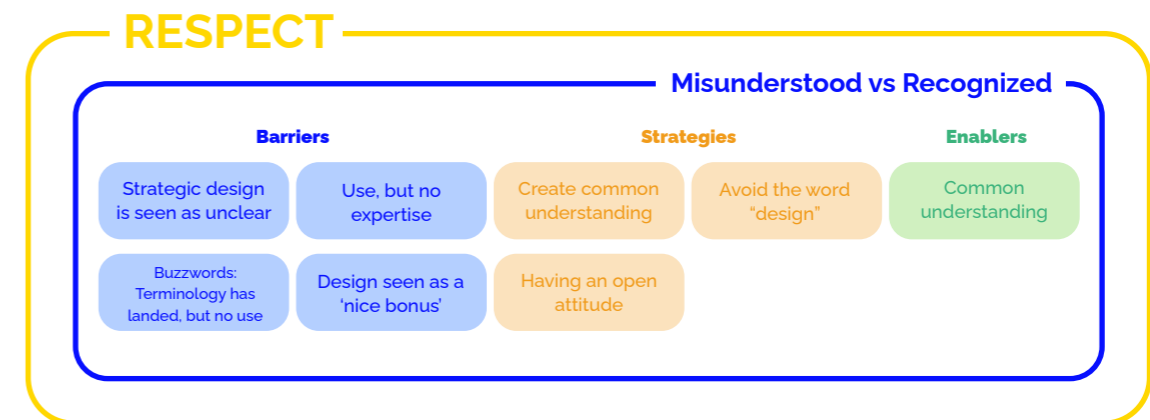
Tension 1 is about rigidity and flexibility: the need to balance the efficiency and structure with creative freedom. The key value to bridge this tension is Trust, the belief that you can rely on someone. According to researcher and author Brene Brown, trust isn't built in grand gestures, but in the small moments that people treat what is important to you with care (Whitney-Coulter, 2021). Trust is fundamental to personal relationships, but it is also a critical value in the workplace. A study by Zak (2017) in the Harvard Business Review found that people in high-trust organizations feel more comfortable taking risks, acting autonomously and expressing their ideas. This leads to more collaboration, communication and ultimately more successful outcomes. This is in contrast to low trust environments, where fear dominates and information is often being withheld (Lewis, 2022). Instead of designers feeling the need to actively take their freedom, both sides should align towards a shared goal with mutual trust.



5.5.2 Bridging Tension 2 through Respect

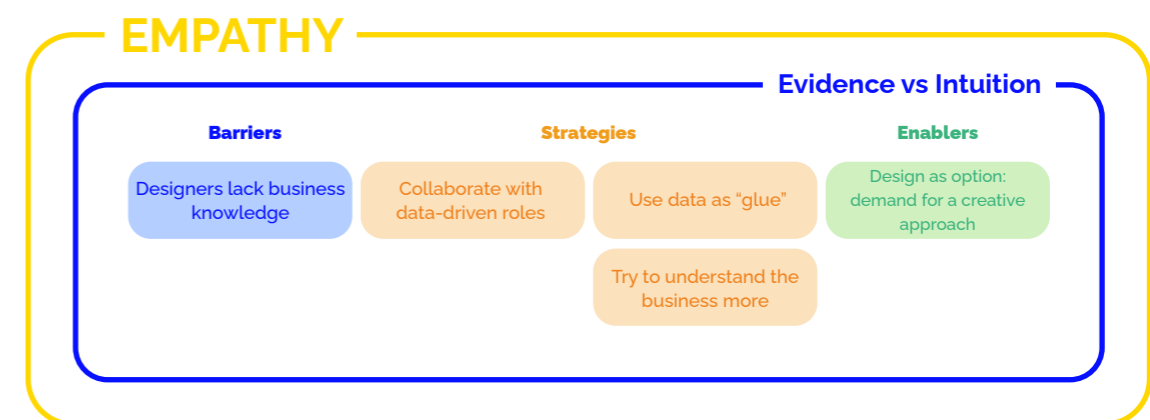
The value of Respect helps to bridge tension 2, which is about being misunderstood versus being recognized. Treating someone with respect means that you recognize their

abilities and worth, that you value their feelings and opinions even if you disagree with them, and that you accept them on an equal basis. Respect is an important value in interpersonal relationships. According to Cuddy et al. (2013), people evaluate each other mainly on two aspects: warmth (this is about trust) and competence (this is about respect). Especially in a professional context, competence is a very important factor. Without mutual respect, it becomes difficult to see the other as a knowledgeable partner, let alone learn from them. By respecting each other's expertise, and being open to learning from each other, design and business can move beyond misunderstanding and build true collaboration.



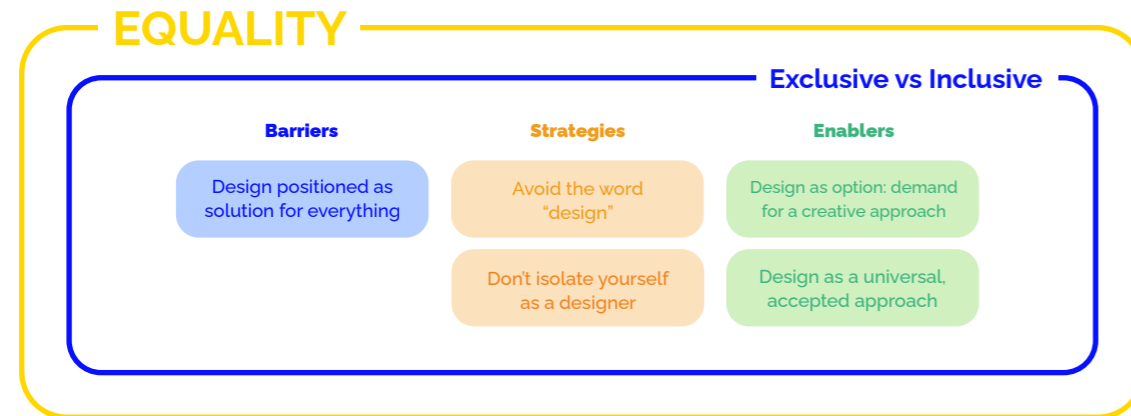
5.5.3 Bridging Tension 3 through Empathy

For tension 3, Empathy is a crucial value for connecting the intuition-driven nature of design with the data-driven approach of business. From a psychological perspective, empathy is the ability to sense the emotions of others and imagine their perspective. This value does not only support compassionate behavior in society at large, such as in healthcare, where empathy strengthens the bond between doctors and patients, but also plays a crucial role in professional contexts (Riess, 2017). According to Zeki et al. (2024), employees who feel understood by their employer and colleagues experience less stress, less burnout and a better mental health, leading to better business performance. In the context of design and business collaboration, empathy fosters mutual understanding. It enables both sides to better understand each other's challenges and perspectives, and to see how they can complement each other.



5.5.4 Bridging Tension 4 through Equality

In order to overcome the perception that design is exclusive, the value of Equality is posed as an important value for bridging tension 4. Equality is the state of being equal, in opportunities, rights and status. In the context of design and business collaboration, this means recognizing design as an approach, and not the solution to every problem. When design is treated as a part of a broader problem-solving toolkit, collaboration can become more inclusive and balanced. Equality fosters this working culture where everyone can contribute their expertise.



5.6 Intersection of Values

When critically examining the four values identified in this chapter: trust, respect, empathy and equality, it becomes clear that these values do not stand alone. They reinforce and depend on one another. Respect contributes to the emergence of trust: without a foundation of trust, respect is difficult to reach. Similarly, both empathy and respect are enablers for achieving equality, because when you genuinely understand or respect someone else's perspective, you no longer position yourself above or below them: you meet as equals.

In this sense, these values form an interconnected system that support meaningful collaboration. Within this dynamic, trust and equality appear to be the central values. Empathy and respect can be seen as enablers that foster and reinforce these core conditions.

That's why trust and equality form the core foundation for the design output to help business and design on a deeper level. By treating both sides as equal parts in bridging the gap between them, a more collaborative and integrated approach can be fostered that benefits both disciplines.



Chapter 6

Solution Space

This chapter elaborates on the solution space for the development of the design, based on the literature review, the interviews and informal conversations that were conducted during the discover and define phase. To structure and clarify the design statement in a complete way, the five WWWWH-questions (Who, What, Where, Why and How) were used as starting point (Van Boeijen et al., 2013). As a result, a design statement was formulated and an interaction vision was created.

6.1 From Input to Design Requirements

Starting point from literature review, to answer the **WHY**:

- ▶ Strategic designers bring a new way of problem-solving that has the potential to expand the business problem-solving arsenal
- ▶ However, for this new “tool” (the designer) to be absorbed, the absorbing context also needs to change .

WHERE should this change happen?

Source	Input	Design requirement
Literature review	This change should happen at the strategic level.	My design should be focused on the strategic level as absorbing context.
Interviews	However, the project level dominates; focus lies on actions and deliverables. A strategic dialogue is missing.	

For **WHOM**?

Source	Input	Design requirement
Literature review and interviews	The strategic context is the absorbing context. People in this context should be involved.	My design should be focused on people in the strategic context (mainly business professionals)

WHAT?

Source	Input	Design requirement
Interviews	Data shows that designers often lack business knowledge and non-designers often lack design expertise – this can reinforce the gap between design and business.	My design should be focused on evoking a dialog that focuses on (existing) frames at the strategic level.
Interviews	The strategies mentioned to mitigate the gaps are often based on a ‘show what you can do’ mentality then an open dialogue.	
Interviews, literature and personal conclusion	Awareness and reflection on existing contexts and frames are needed.	

HOW?

Source	Input	Design requirement
Interviews	Many strategies are focused on a transactional aspect where designer delivers rather than co-creates.	My design should foster interaction instead of transaction
Interviews	Design risk being seen as inclusive experts.	
Interviews and personal conclusion	Data was gathered from designers. Don't tell businesses what to do, but enable them to understand and reflect on how strategic design could be utilized in their business.	Approach: be inclusive, not prescriptive
Interviews and personal conclusion	The core values that were identified during the data analysis.	Mechanism: using the core values equality and trust as catalysts for reflection

their expertise and experiences. Just like in jam session: If you feel your contribution fits, bring it in, your sound will shape the whole. And if the moment calls for someone else's solo, support, listen, and join when the time is right.

Similarly, this interaction is the ultimate goal of the design output. When strategic designers can be seen as part of a broader problem-solving repertoire, reflection at the right level can reveal when their contribution is needed. Just like in a jam session: the saxophone comes in when the moment calls for it, not because it's in a script, but because the group senses it's time. Everyone adapts in harmony.

6.2 Design Statement

The design output aims to evoke conversations at the strategic level rather than the project level, enabling business professionals to reflect on the role of design within their context.

The design facilitates an open, interactional dialogue that fosters mutual exploration, reframing, and envisioning alternative futures.

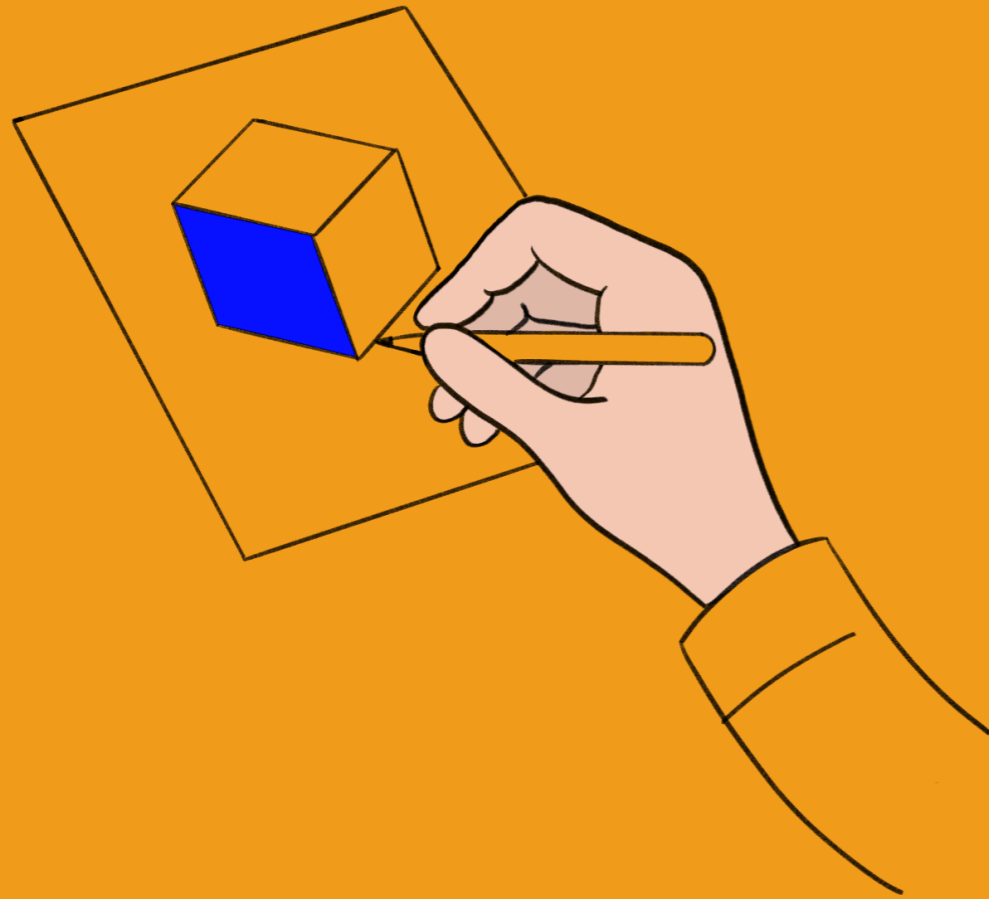
This is supported by an inclusive approach, using the core values of trust and equality as catalysts for reflection and shifting from transactional dynamics to interactional collaboration.

6.3 Interaction Vision

To support the design process, an interaction vision in the form of an analogy was developed. Analogies and metaphors can inspire new perspectives and guide the idea generation process. Seeing a situation through the lens another domain supports the creation of new solutions and creative ideas (Van Boeijen et al., 2013).

The envisioned interaction for the design output can be described as a jam session. In a jam session, everyone plays an essential role and collaboration is guided by a shared understanding of the context. People with unique expertise come together, not to follow a fixed script, but to create something bigger than the sum of its parts.

This is the type of interaction envisioned with the design output: it aims to evoke a conversation in which everyone feels safe, treated as equals and encouraged to bring



Chapter 7

Design Development

This chapter describes how the design output was developed, based on the design statement, interaction vision and design requirements from chapter 6. The goal was to translate the insights found in the literature and data analysis into a design that fulfilled the goal of the design statement. The sections below outline the design development phase.

7.1 Brainstorm and Concepts

Throughout the research process, small individual brainstorms were conducted to spark creativity, either on paper or using Miro. After completing the data analysis, a co-creative brainstorming session was held with a product designer. This session was guided by a series of “How might we…” phrases (Van Boeijen et al., 2013), derived from key components of the design statement (e.g., How might we evoke a conversation? or How might we trigger reflection?). The aim was to gather an overview of creative ideas connected to the design direction. The outcomes of this session are included in Appendix D.

After this, the ideas were reviewed and clustered in a second, individual brainstorm session. From this synthesis, four reoccurring conceptual themes were found: evoking conversations by (1) roleplaying, (2) provocation, (3) Reflection and (4) confusion. These four themes were then translated into initial concepts. To assess their potential and connection with the design statement, the weighted objective method was used. This assessment can also be found in Appendix D.

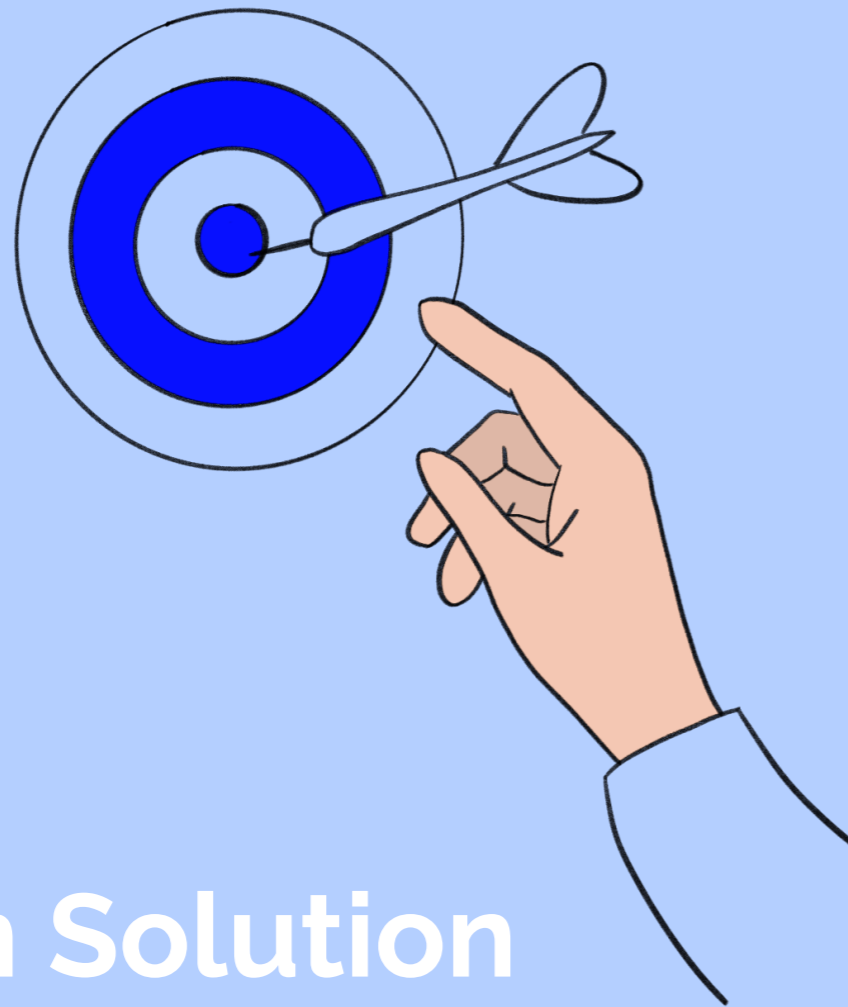
Based on this evaluation, the provotype was selected as most suitable concept. It has the potential to evoke open, interactional and participatory conversations that fit both the design statement and interaction vision. Especially in situations where conversations tend to stay at the project level, a provotype can disrupt traditional thinking patterns and guide the conversation to go deeper.

7.2 Provotyping: Theory

Provotyping is a design approach that uses provocative prototypes to evoke reflection, tensions and fosters alternative thinking. It seeks exploration and dialogue (Boer & Donovan, 2012), unlike traditional prototyping that centers around testing and improvement of a product. The open, interactional nature of a provotype makes it especially suitable for bringing different expertise into dialogue. Rather than solving problems in isolation, the intention is to create a condition for mutual understanding between domains, contexts and expertise. This aligns closely with the aim of the design output: to spark strategic conversation instead of providing solutions.

7.3 Final Design Output: Workshop with Provotypes

After rounds of brainstorming, gathering feedback, and iterating on various concept directions, the final design output emerged. It consists of an interactive workshop experience, build around three provotypes with each its own meaning and function. These provotypes are used in sequence together to form a cohesive whole and are embedded in one workshop, in which the participants are expected to experience reflection, reframing and envisioning stages. In other words, the interactive workshop serves as an intervention to challenge existing frames and reframe the way business professionals see strategic design. At the same time, it aims to offer strategic designers a tool to create space for a dialogue and helps to position themselves within organizational contexts. The creation of this workshop and the choices that were made during its development are explained in the next chapter.



Chapter 8

Design Solution

This chapter presents the initial version of the design output: an interactive workshop built around three prototypes. It describes how each prototype was developed, how they function as a sequence and how the workshop is designed to evoke a conversation. This version reflects insights from the literature, interviews and ideation. The next chapter evaluates how it works in practice and identifies opportunities for further iteration.

8.1 From Insights to Intervention

As described in the theoretical background, strategic design is about challenging existing frames and adopting new ones to find innovative solutions. This abductive way of reasoning is especially valuable in the context of wicked problems, complex situations where conventional problem-solving methods fall short. As a result, organizations increasingly turn to design approaches to navigate uncertainty and complex problems that demand for a different way of thinking.

To adopt this way of reasoning, organizations need to become aware of the assumptions and structures that shape their current context: the K-space, according to the C-K model. This is where strategic design comes in: it starts by revealing existing frames before attempting to shift them, creating frame awareness. This is the realization that everyone operates from a particular perspective and that this perspective influences their actions and decisions.

The workshop with prototypes aims to trigger this frame awareness and explore how strategic design can complement the organization's existing arsenal of problem-solving capabilities.

8.1.1 Target Audience

The workshop is particularly valuable for designers who work alone in an organization and want to contribute to strategic decision making. As became clear from the interviews, collaboration in design teams feels natural, as one interviewee noted: 'We all speak the same language'. However, when a designer is embedded in a non-design team, alignment becomes more challenging. In these situations, the first step is not always to introduce new methods, but to uncover and discuss the existing mental models that shape decision-making.

For that reason, this workshop aims at people who work in a strategic context. In the first place business professionals, for example: managers, innovation lead or strategists. The goal for these participants is not to learn design methods and tools, but to engage in a dialogue that supports reflective decision making and opens up space for new ways of working and problem-solving. The workshop aims to help them recognize where and how strategic design could add value.

At the same time, strategic designers can also benefit from this intervention. The workshop creates space to engage with non-designers working in the strategic field, as well as a tool to support their positioning in the organization and help them articulate their role more effectively. This way, the workshop serves as a tool to explore how both expertise can complement and strengthen each other, while meeting as equals. These intentions are tested and evaluated in chapter 9: Validation.

8.2 Prototypes

The creation of the prototypes started with the inspiration for a single prototype: a children's-book-style analogy about a couple who receive a new phone while their context, the house they live in, remains unchanged. The core idea was to highlight how new tools or innovations are often introduced without integration into existing contexts. This idea aligns closely with the conclusions from the theoretical background

and also emerged from the interviews, where designers described how they often had to develop their own strategies to create space for design within rigid structures.

The original plan was to work with this single provotype, however, after testing the book with peers and observing their reactions, it became clear that the provotype triggered recognition, but lacked the friction to provoke deeper reflection. People liked the provotype, found it cute, funny and understandable, but that was the end of the story. This insight led to the decision to develop a series of provotypes, each with a different tone and focus. Together, the provotypes follow a sequence, from awareness to disruption to reframing. Each provotype links back to insights uncovered during the research analysis.

The following provotypes represent the initial design output, created prior to the validation sessions. This version was tested during two validation sessions. Chapter 9 discusses the validation results and outlines implications for redesign.

8.2.1 Provotype 1: The Book

The first provotype is in the form of an illustrated children's book (Figure 8). The story is about a couple receiving a new phone while the rest of their household context remains the same. It mirrors organizational dynamics and highlights a common pattern: innovation is being introduced, but the surrounding context remains the same. The question becomes: is the phone a useful addition or not? When informally testing this provotype with peers, they mentioned that its tone was warm and accessible, making it an effective soft landing for the workshop.

The role of this provotype is to evoke a reflective conversation about the participant's own organizational context. It's not about pointing fingers, but about noticing the invisible forces, like structures, assumptions and habits that are part of the current context. The goal of the intervention is twofold: (1) to highlight that even strong ideas (like the new phone) require the right conditions to be effective and (2) to build awareness that existing frames and habits may prevent adoption.

From a theoretical perspective, this provotype aligns with the C-K theory, which emphasizes that for innovation to be adopted, the K-space must evolve alongside the concept. It also reflects the Game Changers model, which shows that design only becomes strategic when it redefines the playing field, not just the tools or outputs.

The development of the provotype was also grounded in two tensions found during the data analysis: Rigidity vs Flexibility; the story reflects how structured systems might resist change, and Misunderstood vs Recognized: if the potential value is not understood, something new can be seen as redundant if the context does not evolve as well.

Questions were developed to support the discussion. During the first validation session, it became clear that the initial questions had the potential to keep the discussion going, but some of them were too abstract as a starting point. As a result, the questions were revised in validation round 2 and two types of questions were used: interpretive questions to make sense of the provotype and reflective questions to connect the provotype to the participant's own context.

All three full provotypes and their questions are included in Appendix E.

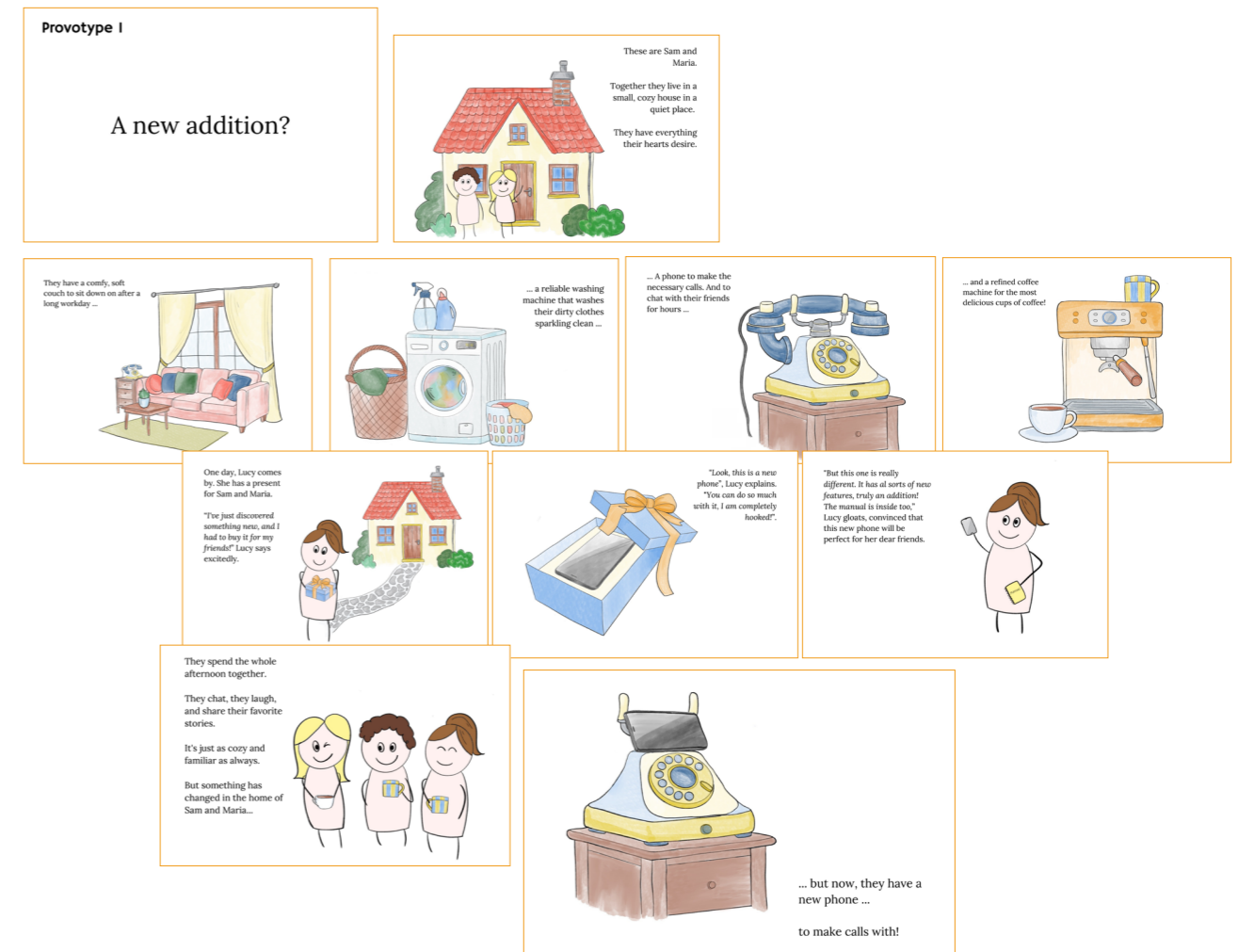


Figure 8: Provotype 1: the Book. The full version can be found in Appendix E.

8.2.2 Provotype 2: The Poster

The second provotype is a poster (Figure 9). In the first round of validation, the provotype depicted a visual metaphor of overload: a cluttered, crowded room filled with all sorts of devices. The intention was to provoke discomfort and recognition: what happens when new approaches are introduced without evaluation or systemic integration? However, the responses from the first round of validation showed that the metaphor was too difficult to interpret and did not evoke the intended recognition. As a result, the poster was revised for the second round of validation.

This provotype builds on the first one; whereas the smartphone in the book appeared as a valuable upgrade, this poster suggests that not every addition is helpful, especially if it lacks integration. It invites you to think about how you perceive strategic design. Do you see it as another tool on the pile of tools you're already using? Or as a mindset to embed? This aligns with the theory from Cross (2023), the poster visualizes what happens when design thinking is applied as tool (DT2), rather than a systemic practice (DT1). The aim is not to advocate for design as the best solution, but to open up a shared conversation about how design is perceived, and to explore where the expertise of designers and business professionals could complement each other.

This second provotype is also based on the tensions identified during the analysis: Exclusive vs Inclusive; design is not “the key,” but part of a broader repertoire for collective sense-making and problem-solving, and Misunderstood vs Recognized; when the purpose is unclear, design can be seen as redundant or ineffective.



Figure 9: Provotype 2: the poster. The textbox says: “We already do design”.

8.2.3 Provotype 3: The Optical Illusion

The third provotype serves as a zoom-out moment after the previous two. Where the first provotype focused on the context in which innovation lands, and the second exposed the friction of overloaded systems, this provotype is about perception. What kind of support could be useful when navigating complexity?

The provotype is a visual illusion of a man wearing a sombrero on a bike, drawn from a top-down view (Figure 10). At first glance, it appears to be something else. This image acts as a metaphor for mental frames: how we look determines what we see. The provotype invites participants to consider how they perceive design, and strategic design, in their organization. This provotype does not aim to provide an answer, but the goal is to open space for an equal dialogue on how strategic design is perceived and how it could complement existing approaches.

From a theoretical perspective, this provotype relates to the distinction between DT1 and DT2 (Cross, 2023), by questioning whether design is seen as just another tool to apply (DT2), or as a way of thinking that shapes how problems are framed and addressed (DT1). The Danish Design Ladder similarly emphasizes that strategic design operates at step 4 of the ladder, not as a product or process, but as a mindset that contributes to decision-making. In addition, the Cynefin framework highlights that in complex domains, abductive reasoning can expand an organization’s ability to navigate uncertainty and uncover new directions.

This provotype aims to provoke a conversation about how design is currently perceived,

and to open space for designers and business professionals to explore how their respective expertise can complement one another. Here, the values of empathy and respect are key: recognizing each other’s contributions and being open to roles that may not always come with predefined outputs.

As in the previous provotypes, both interpretive and reflective questions were used to support discussion.

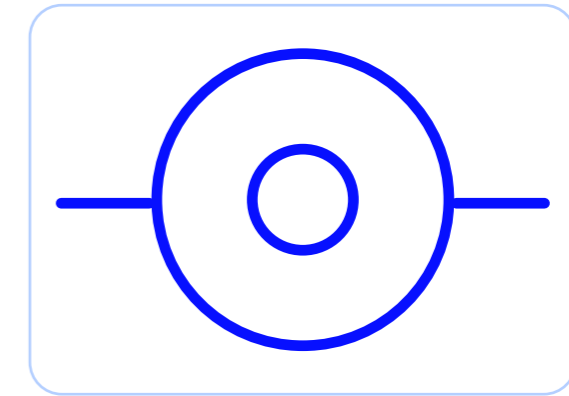


Figure 10: Provotype 3: The Optical Illusion

8.3 Workshop Format

The three provotypes are combined in a 90-minute workshop. The aim is to move the participants from frame awareness, to friction, to reflection. Each provotype represents one stage. The workshop begins with a brief introduction, including practical details and an explanation of the Danish Design Ladder. This ensures a common understanding of strategic design in relation with other, perhaps more familiar, types of design.

Each provotype is then presented one by one, in a collective moment. In between these moments, there’s time for reflection in groups of 3-5 people. Depending on the flow of the conversations, each provotype discussion takes approximately 15 minutes. The discussions are guided by the questions that are put on the table. At the end of each provotype, there is a collective wrap-up moment before moving on to the next provotype. Figure 11 illustrates the five key elements of the workshop. All these elements are evaluated in Chapter 9.

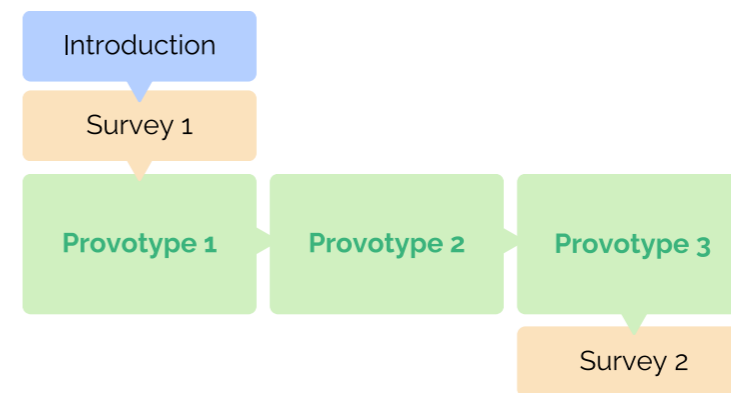


Figure 11: Elements of the workshop

8.4 Validation Sessions

To test the design, two validation sessions were organized, each with its own setup. The first validation took place in a company setting and involved five business professionals. This session was facilitated on site by the researcher. This session followed the intended structure of the workshop. However, as the researcher was the only strategic designer in the room, the session shifted to a more transactional dynamic, with the researcher explaining the provotypes rather than exploring them together.

This was an important learning moment: for the workshop to create space for genuine shared exploration, it is essential that both types of expertise, business and strategic design, are present, and that the researcher can fully take on the role of facilitator. This insight is directly applied in the setup of the second validation session.

A second validation session was organized at TU Delft. Business professionals working in strategic roles were recruited via LinkedIn and the Product Evaluation Lab. In total, 8 participants were present, 2 of them were designers and 6 of them were business professionals. The participants were divided into two groups of four people, and each group included at least one participant with design experience. The chair and mentor of this thesis present valuable insights from their own research as a sign of appreciation to the participants.

At the start of both workshops, all participants signed a consent form in line with the ethical guidelines. Each session was audio recorded and all participants filled in a pre- and post-survey. Together, these data sources form the basis of the validation analysis described in the next chapter.



Chapter 9

Validation and Analysis

This chapter describes the validation of the design intervention: the workshop with provotypes. Until this point, the workshop was mainly developed from a designer's perspective. In this chapter, it is validated in a context that also includes the business perspective. The workshop was evaluated as a whole, while each provotype was analyzed individually. This chapter concludes with key insights and proposes a direction for redesign.

9.1 Validation Focus

The workshop was designed as an intervention to challenge assumptions, provoke reflection and open up an interactional, strategic dialogue between design and business professionals. The provotypes were developed to tell one sequential story, moving from awareness to friction to reflection. They were not tested in isolation, but as part of the complete workshop. Therefore the validation session only provides information on the combined effect of the provotypes and the workshop as a whole. However, the analysis is structured per workshop element. The recordings allow for a closer look at what happened in each part of the workshop and provide insights for future improvements of the design.

To return to the design intent: the workshop was based on some core intentions, as formulated in the design statement. They are grounded in the theoretical background and interviews. The first goal is to evoke a strategic-level dialogue where design and business can meet as equals, making implicit frames and assumptions visible and creating room for reflection. It should foster interaction instead of transaction; the jam-session dynamic. These intentions form the basis of the validation. The survey responses and recordings help to assess to what extent these goals were achieved.

Based on validation round 1, the decision was made to include both design and business perspectives in the workshop. For both groups, the workshop aims to bring a specific value:

- ▶ For business professionals: Does the workshop support a shift in how they perceive the role of strategic design within their organization?
- ▶ For strategic designers: Does the workshop help them position themselves more clearly, and does it provide concrete opportunities for strategic dialogue?

To help answer these questions, the participants filled in a pre- and post- survey. The questions can be found in Appendix F.

The analysis follows a qualitative, open-coding approach done on paper, in Miro and in Word. Each part of the workshop is examined in terms of what it triggered: what kinds of conversations arose, how participants interpreted the material, and whether the intended dynamics were observed. Since this was the first time this workshop was tested as a whole, the analysis remained open to unexpected outcomes and insights. Ultimately, this chapter contributes to answering RQ2: What can be done to make strategic design work within organizational realities? By evaluating what the workshop triggered and where it fell short, opportunities for redesign can be identified.

9.2 Analysis per Workshop Element

Each element of the workshop was analyzed, based on the audio recordings made during the sessions. Only the most relevant insights were extracted and summarized to highlight the key patterns.

Introduction

Intention

The participants had varying levels of familiarity with design, so the aim of the introduction was to create a common understanding of strategic design, and how this form of design relates to other, perhaps more familiar, forms of design such as form giving or design as a process.

Analysis

- » In the second round of validation, participants immediately raised questions about the model, for example:

“What is non-design?”

- » The explanation of the fourth step of the ladder, design as strategy, also raised some questions, but it also active interpretation:

“Can you place this ladder next to the leverage points of Donella Meadows?”

- » As facilitator, I experienced a moment of tension. I did not want to turn this session into a lecture, as the goal of the workshop was to test how the participants explored and defined the concept for themselves. I acknowledged that I did not have all the answers.

Main takeaways and suggestions for iteration

In both rounds of validation, there was a need for more explanation of strategic design. **For the next iteration, it would be helpful to explore ways of providing more information, context or examples, and also leave space for questions and own interpretations.**

This part of the workshop revealed a tension between two facilitator roles: on the one hand, the facilitator is expected to explain the concept of strategic design, on the other hand, the workshop aims to provoke a dialogue rather than provide answers. I was not fully prepared for this tension which led to hesitation. **For a next iteration this tension could be anticipated more consciously, for instance by explicitly acknowledging the ambiguity of strategic design as the part of the purpose of the workshop.**

Provotype 1

Intention

The first provotype aimed to spark reflection on the participants own organizational context. It was designed to highlight that even potential good ideas require the right conditions to succeed and that existing frames may stand in the way of change.

Analysis

- » The provotype triggered recognition and personal reflection. Guided by the questions on the table, the participants shared their own stories and experiences:

**question: Have you ever received something new and thought: what am I supposed to do with this?* “Yes, I clearly remember having that once. I got a gyroscope from my dad once. I didn’t feel it. Yes, I remember thinking, okay, nice. Thank you... and at the bottom of the cupboard.”*

“I notice the same thing in the aviation sector; the less disruptive you are, and the more gradually you can introduce new things, the more comfortable people are with it.”

- » There was a notable openness in the tone of the conversation, multiple perspectives were shared and the participants showed interest in each other:

“Well, that’s just my opinion.”

“Do you have any other ideas?”

- » In all groups, the metaphor was quickly associated with innovation in a new context:

“So I think it’s about innovation.”

- » The wrap-up revealed that participants had become more aware of context and conditions for change:

“Something that, in their everyday lives... was new to them. But they didn’t really feel a need for it at that moment. Without external influence, it probably would have stayed that way.”

- » The link with strategic design was not made. Only in one group, which included a strategic designer, mentioned it:

“Those strategic designers... they’re not designing strategy, they’re designing their own place.”

Main takeaways and suggestions for iteration

In all groups, the book as metaphor was understood and the participants were able to trans-late it to their own practice. They shared their interpretations, own experiences and showed interest in each other’s view, which contributed to an open and equal tone.

During the wrap up, it became clear that this provotype raised awareness about contexts and conditions for change and innovation.

The link with strategic design was not made explicitly. Participants mainly spoke about inno-vation, change, or personal stories, but not about strategic design. **For a next iteration, it would be helpful to explore whether it is necessary (or even desirable) to make the connection to strategic design more explicit.**

Although the questions triggered the conversation, the reflective depth varied between the groups. Sometimes the questions led to deeper reflection, while in other cases they seemed to lead the conversation into directions that were less connected with the intended purpose. **For next iterations, extra attention can be given to the questions.**

Provotype 2

Intention

This provotype aims to provoke discomfort and it questions whether design is seen as a tool or a mindset, and aimed to open a shared dialogue about the perceptions of strategic design.

Analysis

- » Recognition and active interpretation: participants recognized the situation in the poster and interpreted it in relation to their own contexts and experiences:

**Question: is this recognisable?* Well, you just mentioned all that Gen AI. That especially now in this day and age that a lot of people are saying...I already know that or I don't want that"*

"That's what I see, stacked good intentions."

- » In the second round of validation, both groups entered into the discussion on whether design is a tool or a mindset:

"Yes, and sometimes I think it is also that people think, or organisations think, 'we use post-its, so we design.'"

- » The poster triggered minimal reflection about strategic design, mostly in a descriptive or observational way, guided by the questions:

**Question: Is there still room for strategic design* "Yes, I think so. [...] I would maybe throw out the big part anyway. Just start with one. You don't have to try everything at once"*

- » The openness and mutual interest remained present:

*"But for strategic design, can't you apply all those things?"
"At least, that's the impression I have..."*

- » There was a link back to provotype 1:

"A bit like that phone."

Main takeaways and suggestions for iteration

Once again, the provotype provoked recognition and discussion, but the link to strategic design remained minimal and was only made as a result of the guiding questions. **For a next iteration, it could be helpful to test whether the link to strategic design should be made more explicit.**

The discussion about the application and perception of design (DT1 and DT2) emerged. However, these participants do not work together in practice. **It would be valuable to explore how this discussion goes between colleagues and whether this contributes to a different view/use of design in a shared context.**

Provotype 3

Intention

This provotype acts as a zoom-out moment, inviting participants to reflect on how their mental frames shape the way they perceive strategic design within complexity.

Analysis

- » The provotype sparked a discussion on reframing and perspective shifts. The participants spoke about the meaning of reframing

**About the importance of reframing* I think sometimes we don't need to look differently, but first see things fully. Maybe bringing together different perspectives is what reframing really is"*

"With wicked problems, reframing might not be enough."

- » Participants mentioned frameworks and theoretical models, this shows a high level of engagement:

"I recently attended a lecture about different types of complex and complicated problems. That was the Cynefin model."

- » Real-world challenges were mentioned and connected to the discussion, including wicked problems such as water quality, biodiversity loss, AI and defense. This grounded the conversation in actual policy and organizational contexts.

- » Connections with previous provotypes were made, indicating that the participants were connecting insights from earlier provotypes:

"I'm someone who believes the world is already very complex. When it comes to products, we should actually be doing less—not constantly adding more. We shouldn't keep throwing more things into the room, like in that image we just saw."

- » The link to strategic design remained implicit. Participants mainly focused on types of problems and responses, and some still struggled with the definition of strategic design:

"I'm still grappling with the definitions of design and strategy—business strategy, design strategy..."

Main takeaways and suggestions for iteration

The provotypes built well on each other; participants explicitly referred back to earlier parts of the workshop and this third provotype opened up a reflective conversation about reframing and complexity, sharing experiences, information and knowledge. The link to strategic design, however, was not made explicitly. **It would be valuable to test how this connection could be strengthened or made more tangible in future iterations**

9.3 Analysis of Surveys

The survey focused primarily on participants' personal perception of strategic design, both before and after the session. When reading the survey, it became immediately clear that the workshop did not lead to a clearer understanding of the concept. Many participants remained unsure or stated that their view on strategic design hadn't changed much:

"It's just a confusing name for storytelling." or "I am still searching" or "the same"

However, the answers also showed that the workshop had sparked curiosity:

"How many different forms strategic design can take. I'm now curious about the theory and examples"

and awareness of the different perceptions of design:

"I now better understand the confusion. Why aren't you called a 'paradigm designer' or 'culture designer'?"

Several participants also shared personal reflections and insights, often indirectly linked to the themes of strategic design. For example:

"It was really interesting to talk with people from such different backgrounds."

"Context is very decisive, and only partially within our control."

"Don't confuse means with ends."

In summary, although the workshop did not lead to clearer definitions of strategic design, it did activate reflection, contextual awareness, and a sense of openness.

9.4 Main Lessons Learned

The validation session provided rich data through recordings, observations and survey responses. To keep the analysis focused, two strengths of the current design and two main points for improvement are highlighted in this section. These insights informed the redesign proposal.

What worked well:

- ▶ The provotypes worked well as a coherent whole. Based on the audio recordings, it became clear that the participants referred back to earlier provotypes. With each provotype, the conversation deepened and more complex issues were discussed.
- ▶ The tone of the conversations was open and collaborative, the participants showed interest in each other's view and built on each other's contributions. This 'thinking out loud together' dynamic when interpreting the provotypes created space for exploration, even when things were not clear. This was especially the case when both expertise, designer and business, were present at the table, as was the case in validation round 2.

What needs improvement:

- ▶ Participants did not gain a clear understanding of strategic design. Most participants still struggled to define what strategic design actually is. The introduction was intended to provide some context, but it wasn't sufficient to create a shared understanding. Several participants indicated that they would have liked to better understand the concept, which makes this a missed opportunity. As a result, the provotype discussions rarely made a connection to strategic design. I had hoped to keep the session as interactional as possible, and therefore deliberately avoided too much explanation or instruction. In practice, however, this approach didn't work. The book *Design Leadership Ignited* (Quint et al., 2022) poses a model for creating design demand, which outlines three elements: first, awareness (educating about design); second, appreciation (recognizing its value); and third, ambassadorship (investing in design). This workshop started at step two and skipped the first step. It became clear that step one cannot be skipped. More context and explanation need to be included in future sessions, before asking participants to explore or reflect on the value of strategic design, even with strategic designers present, the concept remained vague for many participants.
- ▶ The questions were essential but need refinement. They formed the backbone of each discussion, but the effect of the questions varied. A careful iteration is needed to ensure they invite depth without being too leading, and truly help guiding the conversation in a meaningful way.

9.5 Possible Redesign

The validation session showed that the workshop stimulated open and reflective conversations. However, the core concept of strategic design remained too abstract. As a result, the conversations did not provide guidance around the role of strategic design within an organization, which was the main aim of the statement.

To address this issue, it is proposed to redesign the workshop as a part of a three-part series, which each session having its own focus. The sessions aim to build understanding, reflection and action, acknowledging that these three can not be embedded in one single workshop:

Session 1: Understanding Strategic Design

The aim of this session is to equip participants with a clear and accessible introduction to strategic design, including theory, examples and space for personal interpretation. This addresses the gap observed in the validation: the participants need more context before they can engage in a meaningful dialogue.

Initially, the workshop avoided detailed explanations for fear that giving too much information would shift the dynamic from interactional to transactional. However, this tension no longer needs to be a limiting factor. If the core values identified in Chapter 5 are used as a basis, interaction and information sharing can be mutually reinforcing rather than competing.

For future validation, it would be valuable to test whether this first level provides the right level of understanding, clear enough to support the reflection, but open enough to remain interactional. It would also be valuable to explore how the values identified in chapter 5 can play a central role in this session.

Session 2: Reflection through Provotypes

This is a revised version of the workshop developed in this thesis. With a better understanding of what strategic design is, this session focuses on surfacing assumptions, provoking dialogue, and creating space for multiple perspectives. The provotypes remain central here, as they help to facilitate an open and equal exchange between design and business professionals. The session continues to build on the values from Chapter 5, using them as mechanisms to support open, equal and reflective conversations.

Session 3: Making it Concrete

This session moves towards action. Participants explore how strategic design could complement or strengthen their current way of working, and what this might look like in practice. This session could be supported by hands-on tools, templates, or guided exercises that help participants visualize next steps, capture ideas, and co-create a roadmap for integration. The goal is to leave the session with something tangible, both in understanding and in output. This is based on the validation insight that many participants left the workshop with a sense of confusion, and this third session aims to provide closure by translating reflection into action.

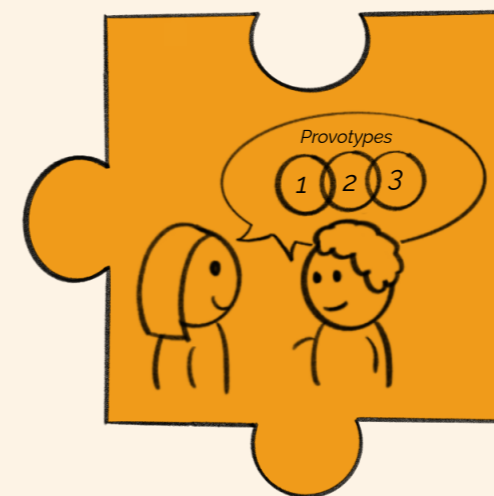
Recommendations for a successful trajectory

- ▶ The workshops are best suited for organizations that want to integrate strategic design into their way of working and strengthen their in-house design capacity. Bringing together colleagues from the same organization may help translate insights into action, especially when the workshop is tailored to their specific context. At the same time, cross-organizational groups can enrich reflection. Further iteration is needed to explore which setting best supports the intended outcomes.
- ▶ Psychological safety is essential for having an honest dialogue. Further iteration is needed to explore how the core values can be effectively embedded and supported during the sessions.
- ▶ The facilitator does not need to be a designer, but must understand the underlying purpose of the workshop. Their role is to guide the group, balancing structure with openness.



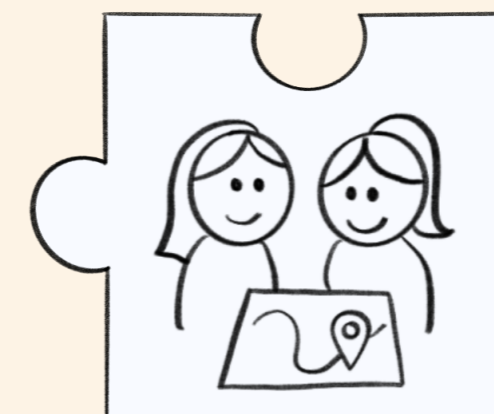
Session 1 Understanding Strategic Design

- Goals:
- Provide a clear and accessible introduction
 - Build a shared foundation for meaningful dialogue



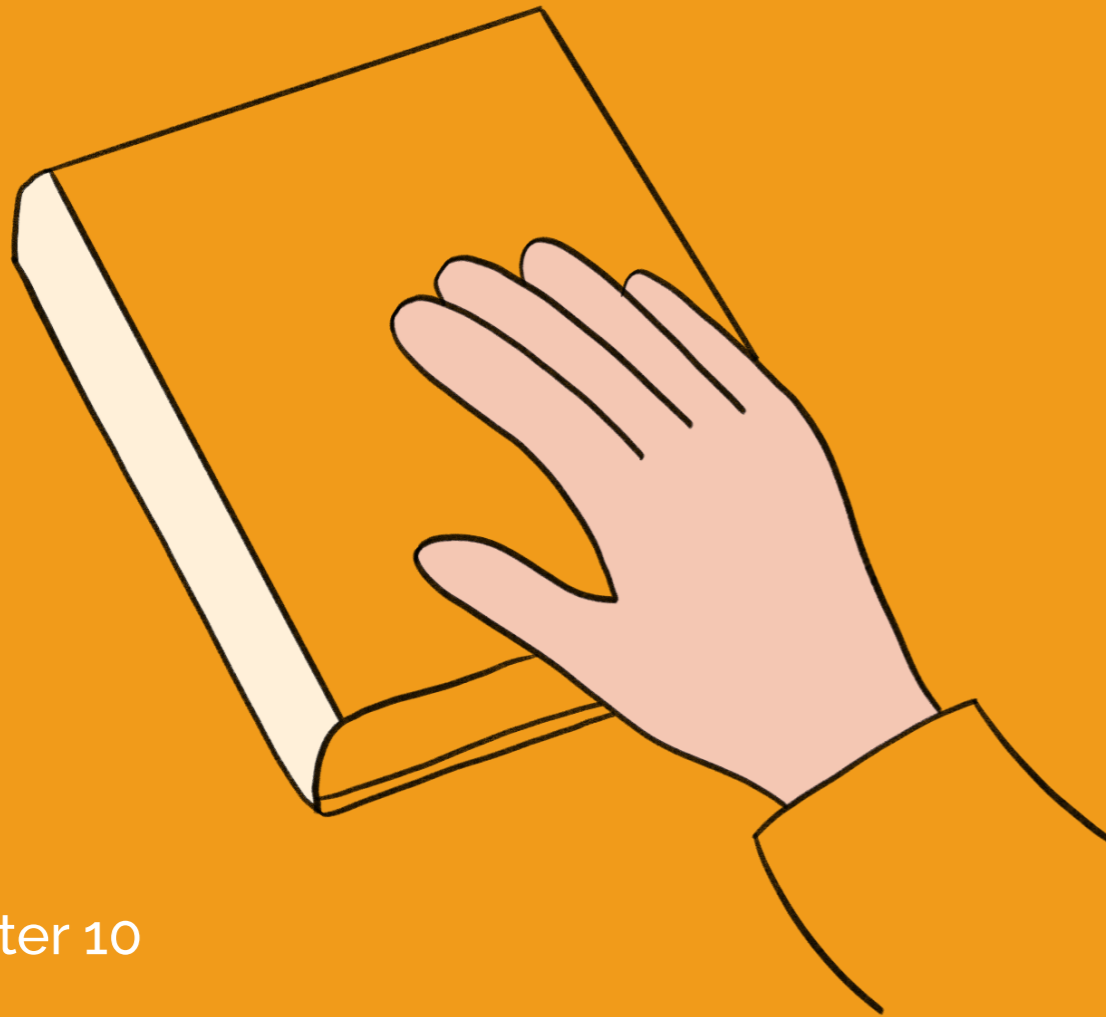
Session 2 Reflecting through Provotypes

- Goals:
- Use provotypes to provoke conversation
 - Reflect on frames and perceptions



Session 3 Making it Concrete

- Goals:
- Explore how strategic design can support current practices
 - Define next steps and actions in context



Chapter 10

Conclusion

This final chapter summarizes the main findings of this thesis by reflecting on the research questions. It also describes theoretical and practical implications and concludes with a personal reflection.

10.1 Conclusion

This thesis originated from personal experiences of friction between design and business. To investigate this topic, two main research questions were posed:

RQ 1: Why does strategic design often struggle to become integrated in organizations?

The findings reveal that the struggle is not caused by the quality or potential of strategic design itself, but by the organizational context in which it is introduced. Strategic design brings a distinct way of reasoning (abduction-2), which can help to switch frames and generate innovative solutions. This is especially valuable in complex situations, where current business problem-solving capabilities sometimes fall short. The value of this approach is recognized, but the integration remains difficult.

Within a business context, the strategic designer is not just bringing a mindset for innovation, they are the innovation. As described in the CK theory and IDER model, successful integration can only take root if the current context evolves alongside the new concept. Without this evolution, design risks being misunderstood or treated like a tool, rather than a strategic actor. The interviews confirmed this challenge. Designers often applied strategies to carve out their own role, navigating rigid structured.

In short, for strategic design to truly take root, organizations must be willing to reflect on their current context and frames. Only then can they expand their existing problem-solving arsenal by embracing a new, innovative force: the strategic designer.

RQ 2: What can be done to make strategic design work within organizational realities?

Based on the insights from RQ1, this thesis argues that the integration of strategic design starts with reflection, on assumptions, frames and own contexts. The designed intervention is a workshop with prototypes, aimed to trigger reflection and an open dialogue between business and design. While the validation sessions sparked engaging conversations, they also revealed a key insight: without a shared understanding of what strategic design actually is, reflection risks becoming vague.

Therefore, the workshop was redesigned as a three-part series. The first workshop aims to build shared understanding about strategic design. The second workshop is the refined version of the initial workshop, and focuses on reflection through prototypes. The third one helps the participants to translate their insights into concrete actions.

This thesis also emphasizes the role of values in making strategic design work. Interviews showed that interactions between business and design often remained at the project level. However, when collaboration moves beyond methods and projects, and is grounded in values like trust, respect, empathy, and equality, new space emerges for mutual understanding and co-creation. These values enable both worlds to meet as equals.

To conclude: making strategic design work is not about pushing harder, it is about listening carefully, seeking mutual understanding, and designing the right conditions in which meaningful collaboration can grow.

10.2 Theoretical implications

This thesis contributes to the existing literature on strategic design by reframing the role of the strategic designer in organisational contexts. Rather than seeing strategic design as an enabler of innovation, this thesis sees strategic design, or strategic designers, as the innovation itself.

Building on theories such as the C-K theory and the IDER model, this thesis shows that the integration of design depends less on the integration of the design itself than on the adaptability of the context in which it lands.

The identification of value tensions and their underlying values add to the growing interest in value-driven organizations. It emphasizes that embedding design demands alignment on at a deeper level.

10.3 Practical implications

This thesis offers insights for both designers, particularly those working in a non-design driven environment, and business professionals who seek to collaborate effectively with design professionals. The results show that strategic design can not be integrated through tools alone, mutual understanding and contextual awareness are essential for meaningful collaboration. The workshop series developed in this thesis provides a practical tool to support this. The structure, from awareness, reflection and action, helps to explore the role of strategic design within one's own context.

10.4 Limitations

This thesis also has some limitations. In the first place, all interviewees were designers. While this provided rich insights into the design perspective, the business perspective remained under researched. Involving business professional earlier in the process could have further enriched the analysis and design output.

The design output is tested in two rounds of validation, with relatively small groups. Although these sessions provided valuable insights that informed the redesign, the revised workshop format has not been tested yet and requires further validation in practice.

Lastly, although the workshop was grounded in the identified core values of trust and equality, the validation sessions did not explicitly assess whether these values were present or perceived during the conversations. A more psychological or behavioral lens could be useful in future research to explore how these values manifest in practice, and how they influence collaboration.

10.5 Personal reflection

I had the opportunity to shape my own thesis based on a topic I find genuinely fascinating. I have learned an incredible amount and I am grateful for the guidance and the opportunities I received along the way. I am also thankful for the honest feedback I received throughout the process. This helped me grow, not only as a designer, but also on a personal level. One of the biggest lessons was realizing how difficult it is to reflect

on your own context and assumptions. It's easy to tell others what to do, but looking inward is where the real growth happens.

Writing this thesis also made me realize how important a strong team. Sometime, I had blind spots I only recognized through the input of others. In hindsight, it would have been helpful to test my design in smaller steps before developing the full intervention, as that would have allowed for earlier feedback and iteration.

I now look forward to experiencing strategic design in practice. I've seen its potential to contribute meaningfully to complex problems within organizations. But I'm still exploring what shape that contribution should take. I have found many answers, but still carry important questions, and I'm excited to keep learning and expand my understanding about this fascination in practice.

Sources

- Amy Cuddy, Susan Fiske, Peter Glick, Holloman, H., Jr., & Yates, P. H. (2015). THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RESPECT. In *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges* (Vols. 15–2, pp. 124–127) [Journal-article]. *Journal of Positive Behaviour Interventions*. https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/staff-welfare/the_psychology_of_respect.pdf
- Björklund, T., Maula, H., Soule, S. A., & Maula, J. (2020). Integrating Design into Organizations: The Coevolution of Design Capabilities. *California Management Review*, 62(2), 100–124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125619898245>
- Boer, L., & Donovan, J. (2012). Prototypes for participatory innovation. Creative Industries Faculty. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/50028/>
- Bouwman, S., Voorendt, J., Eisenbart, B., & McKilligan, S. (2019). Design Thinking: An Approach with Various Perceptions. *Proceedings of the . . . International Conference on Engineering Design*, 1(1), 1443–1452. <https://doi.org/10.1017/dsi.2019.150>
- Brown, T., & Katz, B. M. (2009). Change by design : how design thinking transforms organizations and inspires innovation. In *HarperBusiness eBooks*. <http://biblioteca.iednetwork.com/files/2011/06/change-by-design.pdf>
- Buncic, I. (2024, October 22). 3 Trends changing the diversity equity and inclusion landscape. Top Employers Institute. <https://www.top-employers.com/nl/blog/3-trends-changing-the-dei-landscape/>
- Burch, N., & Gordon, T. (1974). T.E.T.: Teacher effectiveness training. <https://www.gordontraining.com/leadership/four-stages-learning-theyre-circle-not-straight-line/>
- Calabretta, G., Gemser, G., & Karpen, I. (2016). *Strategic Design: 8 Essential Practices Every Strategic Designer Must Master*. BIS Publishers.
- Chetan-Welsh, H. (2023, September 28). Homo habilis, an early maker of stone tools | Natural History Museum. Natural History Museum. Retrieved March 12, 2025, from <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/homo-habilis-early-maker-stone-tools.html>
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *Psychologist*, 26(2). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269928387_Teaching_thematic_analysis_Overcoming_challenges_and_developing_strategies_for_effective_learning
- Cross, N. (2011). Design thinking: Understanding how designers think and work. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB06060968>
- Cross, N. (2023). Design thinking: What just happened? *Design Studies*, 86, 101187. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2023.101187>
- Cuddy, A., Kohut, M., & Neffinger, J. (2013, July 1). Connect, then lead. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2013/07/connect-then-lead>
- Daymond, J., & Knight, E. (2023). Design Thinking in Business and Management: research history, themes, and opportunities. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190224851.013.386>
- Doherty, R., Wrigley, C., Matthews, J., & Bucolo, S. (2014). Climbing the design Ladder: Step by step. QUT ePrints. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/74853/>
- Dorst, K. (2011). The core of 'design thinking' and its application. *Design Studies*, 32(6), 521–532. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2011.07.006>
- Dorst, K. (2015). Frame Innovation. In *The MIT Press eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/10096.001.0001>
- Dorst, K., & Watson, R. (2023). There is no such thing as strategic design. *Design Studies*, 86, 101185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2023.101185>
- Dunne, D. (2018). Implementing design thinking in organizations: an exploratory study. *Journal of Organization Design*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41469-018-0040-7>
- Froeling, K. (2024, October 7). When can you apply Design Thinking? STUDIO.WHY. <https://studiowhy.com/when-can-you-apply-design-thinking/>
- Giri, N., & Stolterman, E. (2022). An analysis of design maturity models used in design organizations. *Proceedings of DRS*. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2022.276>
- Goldense, B. (2019, March 19). A history of product design. *Machine Design*. Retrieved March 12, 2025, from <https://www.machinedesign.com/automation-iiot/article/21837666/a-history-of-product-design>
- Hatchuel, A., & Weil, B. (2003). A NEW APPROACH OF INNOVATIVE DESIGN : AN INTRODUCTION TO C-K THEORY. DS 31: Proceedings of ICED 03, the 14th International Conference on Engineering Design, Stockholm. <https://iced.designsociety.org/download-publication/24204/A+NEW+APPROACH+OF+INNOVATIVE+DESIGN+%3A+AN+INTRODUCTION+TO+C-K+THEORY>
- Ho, L., & Limpaecher, A. (2022, August 30). What is Phenomenological Research Design? Essential guide to coding Qualitative data. *Delve*. <https://delvetool.com/blog/phenomenology>
- Holmes, T., Blackmore, E., Hawkins, R., & Wakeford, T. (2011). *The Common Cause Handbook: A Guide to Values and Frames for Campaigners, Community Organisers, Civil Servants, Fundraisers, Educators, Social Entrepreneurs, Activists, Funders, Politicians, and Everyone in Between* (1st ed., Vol. 2). Anchor Books. <https://publicinterest.org.uk/download/values/Common%20Cause%20Handbook.pdf>
- Koziol-Nadolna, K., & Beyer, K. (2021). Determinants of the decision-making process in organizations. *Procedia Computer Science*, 192, 2375–2384. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2021.09.006>
- Kretzschmar, A. (2003). The economic effects of design. Danish National Agency for Enterprise and Housing. <https://cultmethod.com/assets/pdf/economic-effects-of-design.pdf>
- Lafley, A. G., & Martin, R. L. (2013). Playing to win: how strategy really works. *Choice Reviews Online*, 51(01), 51–0372. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.51-0372>

- Lewis, A. (2022, October 26). Good leadership? It all starts with trust. Harvard Business Publishing. <https://www.harvardbusiness.org/good-leadership-it-all-starts-with-trust/>
- Martin, R. L. (2009). The Design of Business: Why Design Thinking is the Next Competitive Advantage. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Design_of_Business
- Martinez, H., & Martinez, H. (2024, November 21). What is equality? Definition, Meaning & Examples | United Way NCA. United Way NCA. <https://unitedwaynca.org/blog/what-is-equality/>
- Mazerant, E., & Van Der Bijl-Brouwer. (2024). The social dynamics of frame acceptance in organisational innovation settings. Conference: Relating Systems Thinking and Design Symposium. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380938497_The_Social_Dynamics_of_Frame_Acceptance_in_Organisational_Innovation_Settings
- Micheli, P., Wilner, S. J. S., Bhatti, S. H., Mura, M., & Beverland, M. B. (2018). Doing Design Thinking: conceptual review, synthesis, and research agenda. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 36(2), 124–148. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12466>
- MSC Strategic Product Design. (n.d.). TU Delft. <https://www.tudelft.nl/onderwijs/opleidingen/masters/spd/msc-strategic-product-design>
- Quint, E., Gemser, G., & Calabretta, G. (2022). Design leadership ignited. In Stanford University Press eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503629868>
- Riess, H. (2017). The science of empathy. *Journal of Patient Experience*, 4(2), 74–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2374373517699267>
- Rittel, H. W. J., & Webber, M. M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4(2), 155–169. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01405730>
- Schön, D. A. (1983). The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action. Routledge, London.
- Sheppard, B., Sarrazin, H., Kouyoumjian, G., & Dore, F. (2018, October 25). The business value of design. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/the-business-value-of-design>
- Snowden, D. J., & Boone, M. E. (2007). A leader's framework for decision making. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(11), 68.
- Sobel, L., & Schweitzer, J. (2022, April). Understanding the Role of Design As a Practice for Strategy Development [Conference paper]. Innovation Product Development Management Conference, Hamburg, Germany. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362709808_Understanding_the_Role_of_Design_As_a_Practice_for_Strategy_Development
- Storvang, P., Jensen, S., & Christensen, P. R. (2014). Innovation through Design: A Framework for Design Capacity in a Danish Context. *Design Management Journal*, 9(1), 9–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dmj.12006>
- Van Arkel, T., & Tromp, N. (2024). What do designers bring to the table? Identifying key design competencies when designing for societal challenges in the public sector. *Proceedings of DRS*. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2024.370>
- Van Boeijen, A. G. C., Daalhuizen, J. J., Zijlstra, J. J. M., & Schoor, R. S. A. (2013). Delft Design Guide. BIS Publishers.
- Van Der Bijl-Brouwer, M., & Malcolm, B. (2020). Systemic Design Principles in Social Innovation: A study of expert practices and design Rationales. *She Ji*, 6(3), 386–407. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sheji.2020.06.001>
- Verrijt, H. (2020, February 19). DPG Media Privacy Gate. *Eindhovens Dagblad*. <https://www.ed.nl/economie/ontwerpbureau-van-berlo-in-eindhoven-overgenomen-door-amerikaanse-accenture-aabfd8e4/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>
- Voûte, E., Stappers, P. J., Giaccardi, E., Mooij, S., & Van Boeijen, A. (2020). Innovating a large design education program at a university of Technology. *She Ji*, 6(1), 50–66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sheji.2019.12.001>
- Whitney-Coulter, A. (2021, February 5). Brené Brown on What it Really Means to Trust. *Mindful*. <https://www.mindful.org/brene-brown-on-what-it-really-means-to-trust/>
- Wilson, M. (2015, May 14). McKinsey & Company Acquires Lunar, One Of Silicon Valley's Oldest Design Firms. *Fast Company*. <https://www.fastcompany.com/3046260/mckinsey-company-acquires-lunar-one-of-silicon-valleys-oldest-design-firms>
- Wrigley, C. (2013). Educating the “Design Innovation Catalyst” for change. Queensland University of Technology. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/61383/>
- Zak, P. J. (2017, January 1). The neuroscience of trust: Management behaviors that foster employee engagement. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2017/01/the-neuroscience-of-trust>
- Zaki, J., Hancock, B., Weddle, B., & Rahilly, L. (2024). It's cool to be kind: the value of empathy at work. In McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/its-cool-to-be-kind-the-value-of-empathy-at-work#/>

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction

Me: thank you for willingness, tell structure and purpose of interview

1. What is your role? And title?
2. Do you have a design background? If not, what is it?
3. How long have you been working in this role?
4. Can you briefly describe your day-to-day work?

The role of design in the company

1. How many designers work in the company? Where are they working?
2. How would you describe the general role of design in the company?
3. In what way is design mainly used in your company?
4. In what way do you feel design is seen in your company?
5. Which methodologies are mainly used?

Perception of design

1. In what way do you apply design in your daily work?
2. How do you see design?
3. What would you say is a strength of design?
4. How do you experience the way design is used in your company?
5. What do you think is good about it?
6. What could be taken to the next level?

Collaboration

1. Do you work together with other designers or with non-designers?
2. How do you experience this collaboration?
3. Do you notice a difference in the working methods of designers and non-designers?
4. What, if any, is the difference?
5. How do you complement each other?
6. Where do you sometimes clash?
7. Question about understanding design: Do you feel that design is also seen by colleagues as you see it yourself? Or are there sometimes misunderstandings?

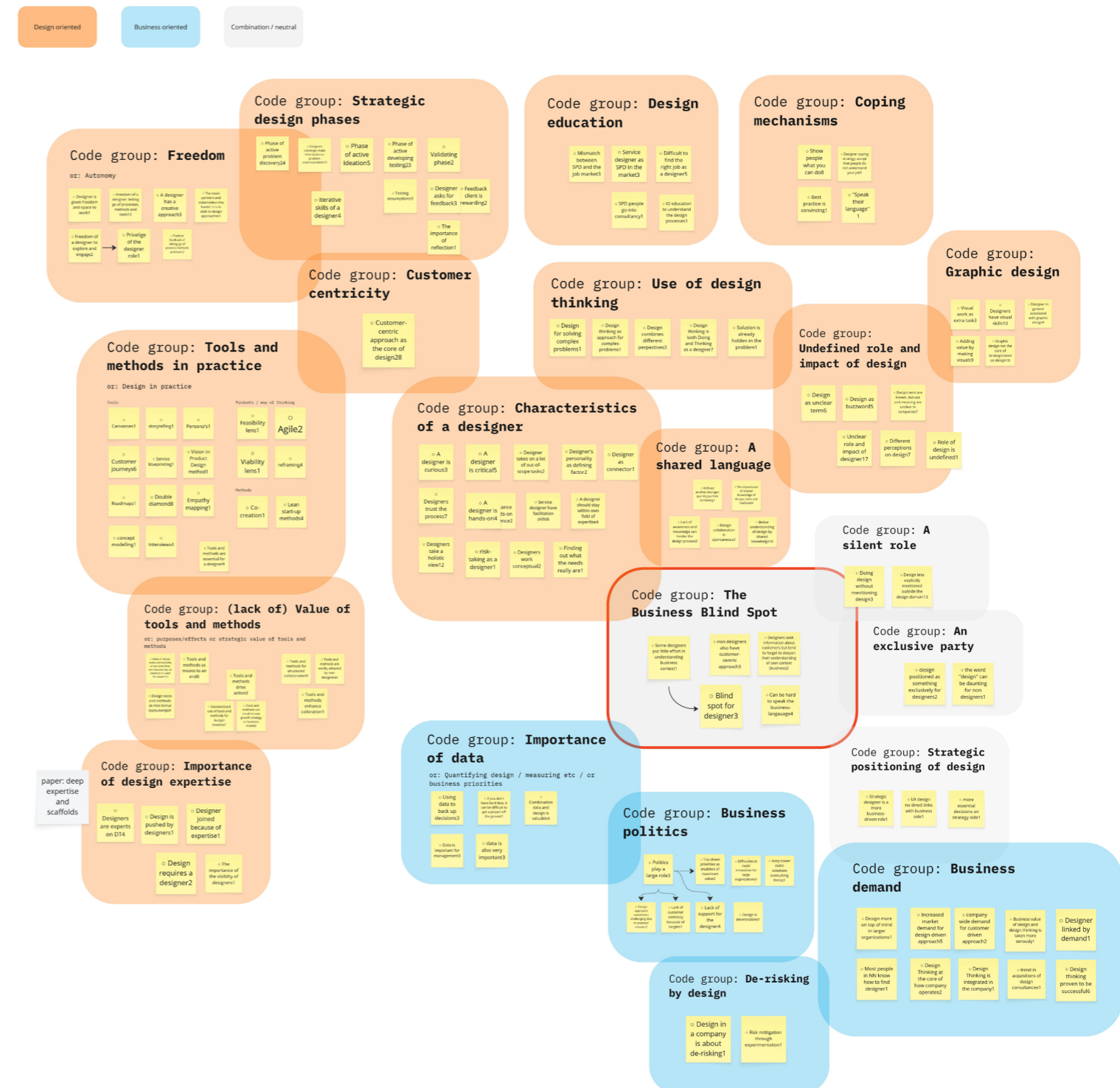
Example: project

1. Can you recall a project you were involved in as a designer and that you felt your contribution was of great importance?
2. Ask more questions about this project: what did you do, when involved etc.
3. How did such a project start?
4. When did you get hooked? And for what reason?
5. How do any clients react?

Topics to raise (if they haven't come up):

- design as a new way of solving problems (often comes up in the literature). Do you recognise design in this way?
- Are there things I forgot to ask?

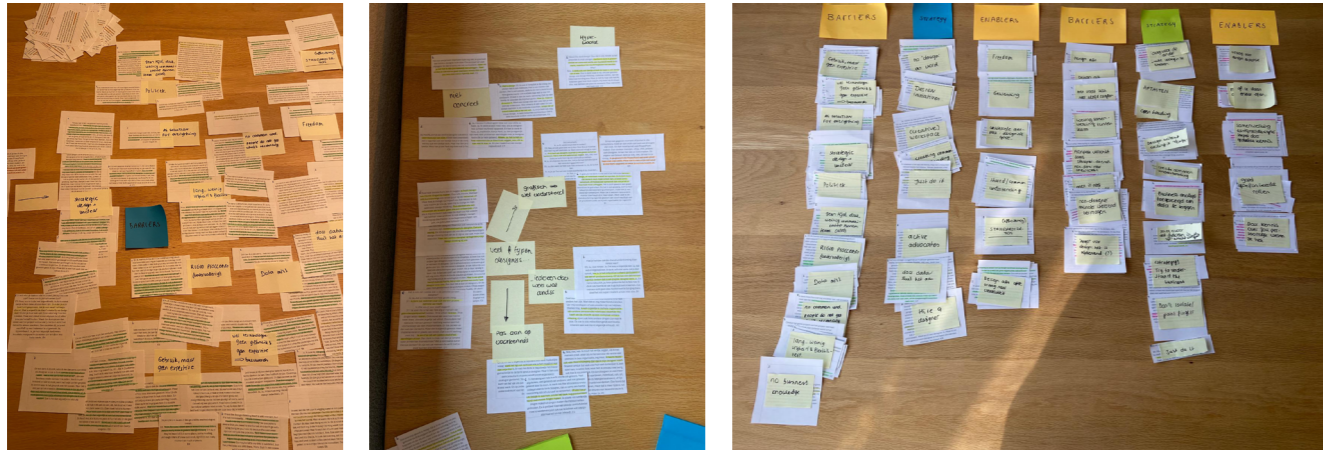
Appendix B: Code Groups Resulting from Descriptive Coding



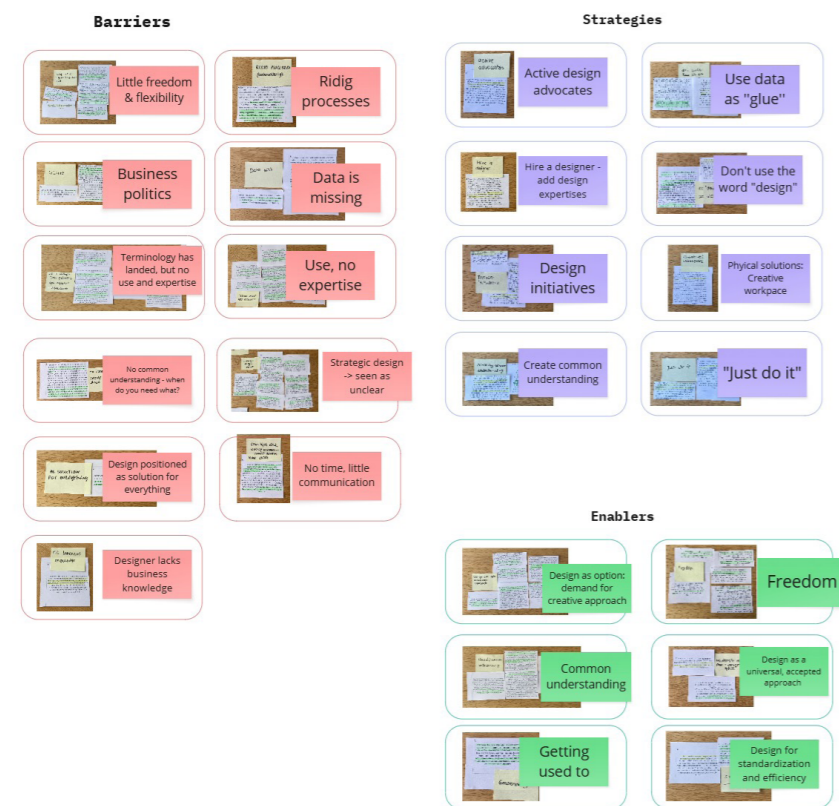
Result: 22 code groups / themes

Appendix C: Clustering Process

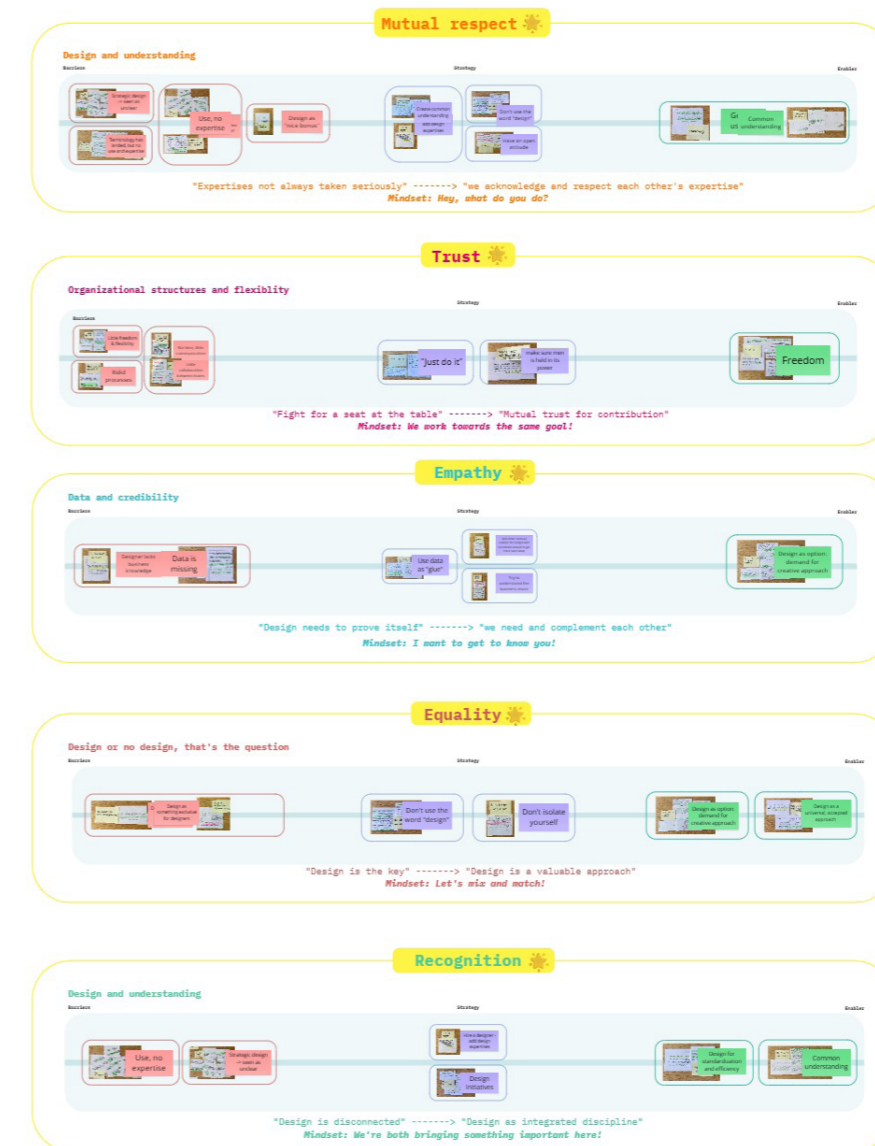
First, all quotes that responded to one of the survey questions were collected. These were then printed, and the most interesting sentences were highlighted. Clusters were created based on these highlights, identifying barriers, enablers, and strategies.



These clusters were then transferred to Miro.



Based on this clustering, the overarching frictions were identified.



Appendix D: Evaluation of Brainstorms

Interaction through games

Roleplay game

Being provocative

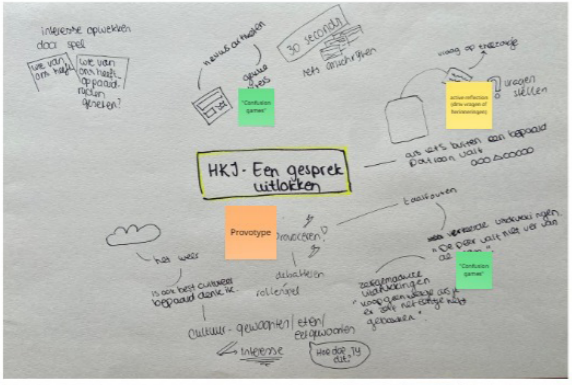
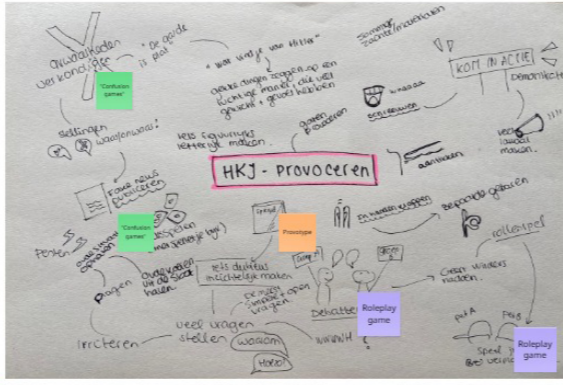
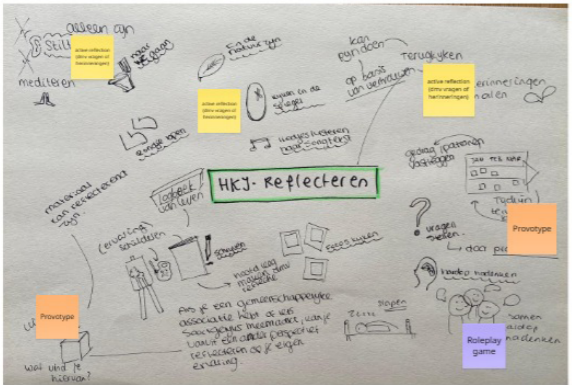
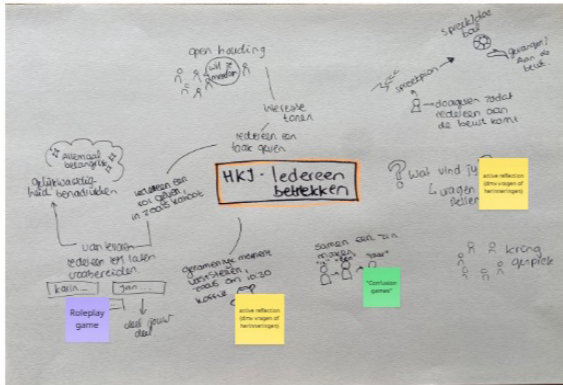
Provotype

Encourage personal reflection

Personal reflection questions

Use confusion to evoke a conversation

"Confusion games"

Weighted Objectives Method		Roleplay game	Provotype	Personal reflection questions	"Confusion games"
Interactive instead of transactional	25	8 200	8 200	5 125	8 200
Inclusive instead of prescriptive	25	5 125	8 200	9 225	8 200
Fosters active reflection / encouragement of self-reflection	30	8 240	9 270	8 240	6 180
Room for Reframing of the Situation	20	6 120	7 140	6 120	7 140
	100	685	810	710	710

Explanations:

1 - yes. Everyone is equally important

2 - you 'play' another person without actually being the expert. So it could feel prescriptive; it's not 'real'

3 - Yes.

4 - Linked to point 2, hopefully yes, but you don't use 'real' expertise.

Explanations:

1 - Yes, depends on your design of course

2 - Yes. Everyone can reflect from their own perspective

3 - Yes.

4 - Depends on the quality of the provotype, but yes.

Explanations:

1 - not really if it's too personal

2 - yes!

3 - Yes.

4 - could be, but interaction is needed.

Explanations:

1 - yes

2 - yes

3 - Yes, but as step

2. First step is navigating through the confusion

4 - Hopefully, but the attention might go to the confusion-part too much

Appendix E: Provotypes

Provotype 1: the Book

Provotype 1

A new addition?



These are Sam and Maria.
Together they live in a small, cozy house in a quiet place.
They have everything their hearts desire.

They have a comfy, soft couch to sit down on after a long workday ...



... a reliable washing machine that washes their dirty clothes sparkling clean ...



... a phone to make the necessary calls. And to chat with their friends for hours ...



... and a refined coffee machine for the most delicious cups of coffee!



One day, Lucy comes by. She has a present for Sam and Maria.

"I've just discovered something new, and I had to buy it for my friends!" Lucy says excitedly.



As soon as Maria spots Lucy coming, she hurries to the door.

"Lucy! Welcome! It's been so long, come in!" Maria calls cheerfully.



Maria and Lucy sit down on the comfy couch, while Sam heads to the kitchen to make a nice cup of coffee.

Maria unwraps the present. As soon as she sees what's inside, she looks a little surprised.



"Look, this is a new phone". Lucy explains. "You can do so much with it, I am completely hooked!".



Sam chuckles as he walks in from the kitchen with steaming cups of coffee.

"Haha, that's so sweet of you! But we already have a phone. Look, it's right there in the corner!"



"But this one is really different. It has all sorts of new features, truly an addition! The manual is inside too." Lucy gloats, convinced that this new phone will be perfect for her dear friends.



"Well, if you say so..." Sam says. He still looks a little unsure.

Maria, who loves new gadgets, turns the phone on right away and places it next to the old one.

And the manual? That disappears into the drawer.



They spend the whole afternoon together.

They chat, they laugh, and share their favorite stories.

It's just as cozy and familiar as always.

But something has changed in the home of Sam and Maria...



... they still have their comfy, soft couch to flop onto and chat with friends ...



... they still have their trusty washing machine to get dirty clothes sparkling clean ...



... they still have their fancy coffee machine for the most delicious cups of coffee ...



... but now, they have a new phone ... to make calls with!



Questions Provotype 1: The Book

Interpretation Questions:

- What is actually happening in this story?
- Have you ever received something new and thought, “What am I supposed to do with this?”, while the person giving it to you was convinced of its value?
- What could the phone symbolize?
- Is the new phone an addition? Or rather a distraction?

Reflection Questions:

- Do you think Sam and Maria will use the full potential of the phone? Why or why not?
- Do we recognize this pattern in our own context?
- Who or what could Sam, Maria, and Lucy represent within our organization?
- Which character do you most identify with, and why?
- What if the phone symbolized a strategic designer? Would it then reach its full potential in a business context?

Questions Provotype 2: The Poster

Interpretation Questions:

- What do you see here?
- Do you recognize anything from your own context?
- Do you relate to what the person in the image is saying?

Reflection Questions:

- What would you like to say to the person in the poster?
- Do you think there is any strategic design present in the room? If so, where? If not, what could it add?
- Do we sometimes confuse activity with impact?
- Is there still room for strategic design in the room shown in the poster?

Questions Provotype 3: The Optical Illusion

Interpretation Questions:

- How did you first interpret the doodle in Provotype 3? How did your perspective change once you knew what it was?
- In complex situations, a solution often only emerges after a reframing takes place — when you start looking at things differently. Do you recognize this?

Reflection Questions:

- Do we see strategic design as just another tool on the shelf, or as a lens to understand complexity?
- What does a complex situation ask of us: doing more, or looking differently? Who can play a role in this?
- What is needed: more tools, or better reflection?

Appendix F: Survey Questions

Business Professionals

Before

1. What does strategic design mean to you?
2. What comes to mind when you think of a strategic designer?
3. In your opinion, what makes a new approach, method, or innovation truly take root in your organization?

After

1. What does strategic design mean to you now, after this workshop?
2. What comes to mind when you hear the term ‘strategic designer’ now, after this workshop?
3. What do you now see as important conditions for a new approach, method, or innovation to successfully take root in your organization?
4. What do you see differently than 90 minutes ago, and what insights are you taking away from this session?
5. What would you now say is the added value of strategic design?

Designers

Before

1. How do you position yourself as a strategic designer?
2. What do you see as your most important qualities as a strategic designer?
3. In your opinion, what makes a new approach, idea, method, or innovation truly take root in your organization or with a client? What factors are involved?

After

1. How do you position yourself as a strategic designer? Has anything changed in this regard after the workshop?
2. What do you now see as your most important qualities as a strategic designer? Has this changed after the workshop?
3. In your opinion, what makes a new approach, idea, method, or innovation truly take root in your organization or with a client?
4. What do you see differently than 90 minutes ago, and what insights are you taking away from this session?
5. Does this workshop provide you with tools or insights to engage in conversation with people in a business context, and to explore how strategic design could play a role in strategy and decision-making?