Brand design &
graphic identity

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Bridging the gap between business and creativity

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PELCKMANS

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'Make my logo bigger'

Is placing a big logo on a poster the best way to attract more attention? In this chapter we will discuss the communication between managers and designers, and how you can improve it. How do you conduct conversations among different stakeholders? Why do conflicts sometimes arise and how can we bridge the gap between the rational world of business and the intuitive world of design?

01

01

Introduction

A —
Bridging the gap between business and creativity

Communication in matters relating to graphic design can be challenging for both business people and graphic designers. For instance, when you request a minimalist logo, but receive a single underlined word in response, it may be too minimal for your liking. You expected something more!

If you complain to the designer, they might not understand what you want since they designed exactly what you asked for.

Another example: as a designer, you need the vector file (a scalable graphic, built up from a series of simple geometric figures) of the company logo, because you have been asked to make a poster for the company and the logo needs to be visible on a large scale. What you receive are many other files, none of which is the vector file. How frustrating!

This book aims to bridge the gap between business and creativity by providing managers, marketers and graphic designers with a common language to communicate about their design needs. It strives to simplify graphic communication and eliminate as much noise as possible.

In the following chapters, we will explore profiles on the business side and on the creative side. On the business side, this includes managers, marketeers, entrepreneurs, and so on. On the creative side, this means graphic designers and designers. For simplicity, we will refer to these two groups as managers and designers, although we acknowledge that the reality is more complex.

This instructional book is intended for managers – such as project managers, account managers, marketeers, etc. – who regularly encounter graphic design in their work, even if they have little or no experience in the field. It also seeks to offer interesting insights for designers who need to work together with managers; for example, in matters such as the importance of good market research and the development of a good brand identity. By improving mutual understanding and creating more efficient communication between managers and designers, the creative process will not only be speeded up, but will also be more pleasant and more trouble-free.

The subjects covered in the book include: how to design a strong brand, the basic principles of branding and design, creating a visually strong brand, the positioning and presentation of a brand, and tips and tricks to improve your design. These topics are viewed from the perspective of customers, designers and managers, providing insights into their underlying reasoning and their different interests.

B —
Why this book?

We live in a visual world. The number of images that consumers see each day has grown exponentially in recent years. For this reason, attracting the consumer's attention has become increasingly important for brands. To position a brand effectively in a market, it is necessary for marketeers, managers, entrepreneurs and designers to collaborate with each other. Unfortunately, this partnership between business and design does not always run smoothly. This book provides a number of tools that can strengthen that partnership.

The business side approaches things from the perspective of analytical sciences. Results and figures prove success. Predicting what the next month will look like and then setting certain objectives based on those predictions are the key drivers of marketeers, managers and entrepreneurs. Data is used to support these people in the performance of their work. In this way, the company's management can determine in an objective manner whether or not the desired level of success has been achieved. Measuring is knowing. And knowledge is power.

Running alongside this analytical thinking, there is also a complementary stream of creative thinking. Visionaries in companies dream about the future and design an image of that future that matches their vision. Imagination is central to this process. The purpose is to involve people in a story of change. Images make this possible by evoking and appealing to people's emotions. That being said, it is always difficult to know whether the future image of a company is correct – or not. The visionary has no more than a positive 'gut feeling' about what is likely to happen and uses this as the basis for their image creation. Of course, gut feeling and intuition are almost impossible to evaluate using hard criteria. As a result, evaluations of this nature tend to be subjective. This subjectivity is something that is difficult for management teams to accept. This means that when the future vision is implemented, the management will still attempt to rationalise its success by setting certain criteria.

The visionary, creative thinkers are not the only people in the company who seek to capitalise on people's feelings through images. Designers create images to persuade consumers, customers and/or employees in a particular story and convince them to take action. Graphic designers give ideas a visual form in various different media, with the aim of conveying information. They combine artistic and technical skills to blend images and text into an interesting and coherent composition. By creating good designs, designers help managers, marketeers and entrepreneurs to achieve more sales, greater brand recognition, increased customer loyalty and more convinced colleagues.

An analyst asks questions about how things work. A designer looks at how things could or should work for the people for whom they are designed. This is a question that stimulates the imagination. Why? Because it is a question that is difficult to answer analytically. Consequently, the designer needs to approach the answer to the

question intuitively. As a result, the success of a design is difficult to predict using hard business criteria.

In the business and management world, 'design thinking' is currently one of the new buzz concepts. Design thinking is the process of finding creative answers through a combination of analytical and intuitive thinking. The concept first originated during the 1960s, and since then it has been further developed as an approach to find innovative and imaginative solutions for a whole range of different questions and problems.

Companies that are undergoing digital transformations frequently embrace this concept and use it indiscriminately. Suddenly, everyone is capable of design thinking. We all need to believe more in our own gut feelings! This leads to the design process being included in a wide variety of projects. But just because you know the different stages of the process, this does not mean that you are capable of implementing it correctly. Critical designers argue that design is a professional discipline and that good design is something that requires years of practice to achieve. It is a bit like top-quality cooking. Just because you can follow a recipe from a cookbook, this does not mean that you will instantly become a gourmet chef!

Like gourmet chefs, designers have practised long and hard to acquire their skills. They have both followed a lengthy growth pathway, which has been influenced by their cultural environment and personal aspirations. Like a gourmet chef, a designer creates a personal designer identity, which colours their focus. For example, a designer who is passionate about building sustainable brands will never design anything for the throwaway society. Just as a chef who specialises in French cuisine will never put a Chinese dish on their menu.

A designer does more than simply beautify and embellish things. The strength of a skilled designer lies in their ability to comprehensively grasp the context, and effectively connect it with aspects such as user-friendliness, purpose, and functionality from the users' perspective. At the same time, they also possess the necessary technical ability to make tangible representations of the concepts involved. Designers do this by making prototypes (mock-ups or mood boards) that allow stakeholders to personally experience, analyse, understand and validate these concepts. In other words, designers know how to transform stories into an image or visual concept by making use of the visual and plastic arts. In this way, discussion of the stories and concepts becomes possible, which helps to resolve any underlying problems. Despite possessing such skills, a significant number of misinterpretations still persist between the realms of business and design.

It is not the purpose of this book to 'retrain' marketeers, entrepreneurs and managers or to convert them into professional designers. Its purpose is to make businesspeople more aware of the value of design. In this way, by using good communication, it is possible to bridge the gap between business and creativity. The world of business and the world of design are capable of enriching each other. By bringing these two worlds together, we can create a better, more pleasant and more attractive world for customers.

C —
Differences

The following table highlights a number of differences between managers, marketeers and entrepreneurs on the one hand and designers on the other hand. We will then delve a bit deeper into some of these differences.

Manager	Designer
Analytical thinking, business thinking	Creative thinking, imaginative thinking
Rational, fact-based	Emotional, feelings-based
Objective	(Often) subjective
Figures, results	Attractive, aesthetic, functional
Office toolset	Design toolset
Pays for the service	Provides the service

DIFFERENCE 1

Different criteria: facts and figures versus good design

A design can be viewed from different perspectives. When a manager approves a design, there is a risk that they may do so based on their personal preferences. The reason is that managers find it challenging to make design-related decisions based on design requirements. There are very few managers who will ask their designer to change from a Century Gothic font to a Helvetica font or to add a little bit of magenta to the proposed blue colour scheme. Managers are trained to think in terms of business priorities, such as meeting targets and generating profit.

In short, the main objective for most managers is to achieve positive results; for example, for a marketing campaign. The success of this campaign is evaluated based on various metrics, such as the number of views, the number of interactions, the level of sales generation, the number of through clicks to the website, the number of additional products sold, and so on. A manager also looks at hard criteria, such as time and price. In contrast, the main concern of the designer is to make a good design: clear, attractive and functional. A manager says: 'Give me something brilliant, as soon as possible and as cheaply as possible'. A designer explains that those three things – brilliant, fast and cheap – are very difficult to combine.

A designer might think that their design is good and logical, whereas the manager might think that this design is not ideal to attract the customers they want. This can lead to conflict, because business requirements and design requirements focus on different things. The manager thinks that the design has taken too long to make and is too expensive. The designer responds that it takes time to create something good. Taking more time offers the advantage that the designer can carry out more research into the target group that interests the manager. It also means that they can 'sleep' a few nights on their original design idea, to make sure that they are on the right track.

In graphic design circles, you often see the following visual. The message it wishes to convey is that you can only realistically choose two of the three key criteria to apply to any design task. The choice you make will define the designer's way of working.

Good

Fast

Cheap

Does not exist!

Fast and good
A promptly delivered design of high quality, but at a high cost.

Fast and cheap
A promptly delivered design at a low cost, but also looking cheap.

Good and cheap
A low-cost design of high quality, but with super-slow delivery.

DIFFERENCE 2
A different world of tools

Managers and designers use very different tools. The manager works primarily with Office software packages like Word, PowerPoint and Excel. Designers make use of specific design software, like Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. The software offers designers more freedom and room for manoeuvre in the design process, but this comes with a (steep) learning curve. Unfortunately, some managers think that it is as easy to learn how to use this software as it is to learn their standard Office tools. The quotes below illustrate the kinds of conflict this can cause:

'Why is it taking so long to design my poster? In Word, you can do it with just a couple of clicks!'
Manager 1

'At the moment, the model in our advertisement looks too European, bearing in mind that we want to target our product primarily at Chinese customers. I really want to use the photo, but can you photoshop the model so that she seems to be more Chinese?'
Manager 2

Both these examples happen quite often. In the first case, the manager knows nothing about design, but thinks that it is as easy as cutting and pasting images in a Word document. 'After all,' they say, 'Adobe and Microsoft Office are both software, aren't they?' In the second case, the manager overestimates the possibilities of the design tool. They think that you can do almost anything with Photoshop, because they once saw a documentary on television about the photoshopping of models in magazine shoots. However, the manager forgets (or is not aware) that even sophisticated software has its limitations.

DIFFERENCE 3
Payer and service provider

The relationship between manager and designer is often one of payer and service provider. Understandably, every payer wants value for money, so the manager has every incentive to try and get the best possible deal. 'For that price, I think that this is good enough, but could you possibly add this and that?' is a sentence that designers often hear. Other similar pieces of popular wisdom, such as 'the customer is always right' also make it more difficult for the designer to sell their work for what it is actually worth.

During the design process, the graphic designer must consider the target group, the wishes of the customer, the financial implications and the technical feasibility of the design. The designer has to make choices about the nature and quality of both the form and the content. They must select the best font for maximum legibility and pick

the right colour as the eye-catcher for the most important pieces of information. They also offer their client – the manager – advice about the best way to complete the assignment.

Managers and designers have different perspectives that can both influence the end product. The opinions of the manager and the ideas of the designer form the two sides of the design coin. It often happens that designers and managers have very different interpretations of what is needed for the implementation of the same task, but at the end of the day it is necessary to find a single result on which they can both agree. In other words, graphic design needs to offer the best possible win-win solution for both the manager and the designer.

The manager's briefing

The designer's design

The needs of the customer
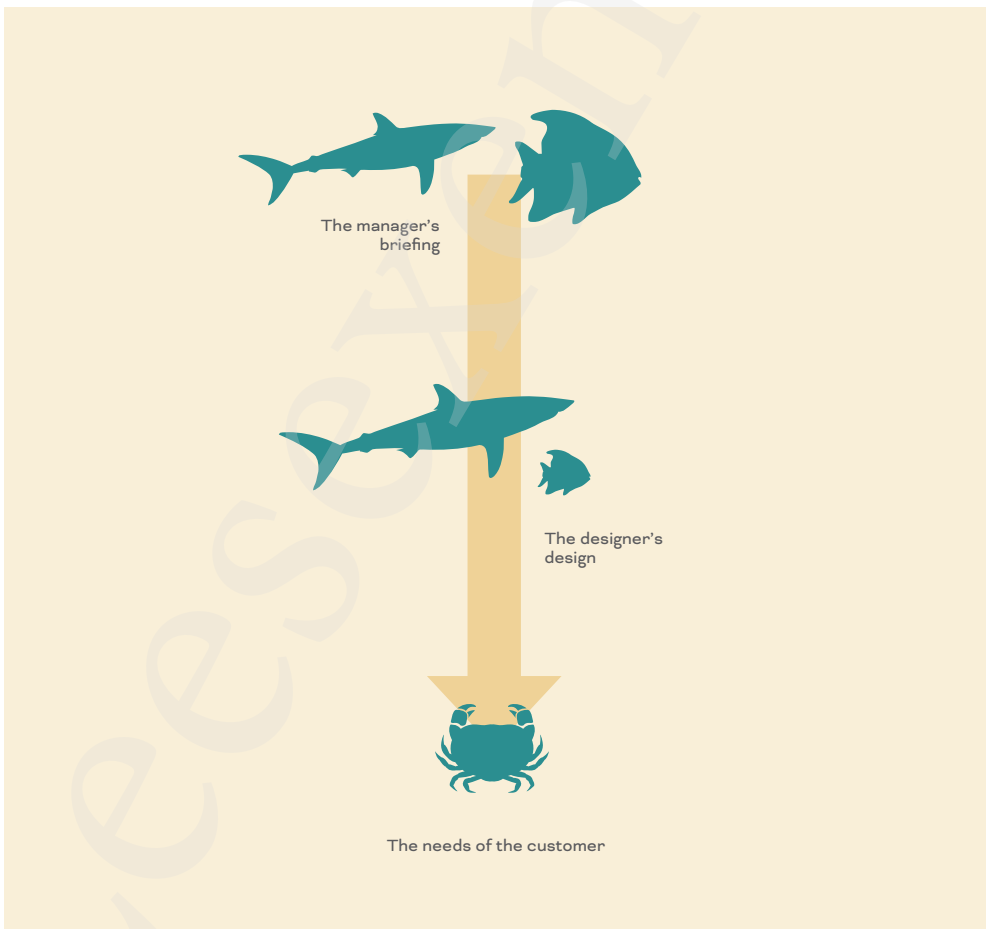
The manager's briefing can differ from the needs of the customer

D —
What's in a name?

In this book, we will refer to the roles of designers, managers, entrepreneurs and marketeers. Primarily, however, we will use the terms 'designer' and 'manager', even though this is a simplification of the more complex reality of the worlds of business and creativity. 'Manager', in particular, is an umbrella term that covers a variety of functions. That being said, there are a number of different profiles on both the business side and the design side, the most common of which are listed below.

Designers

A *graphic designer* works on printed matter, posters, brochures, packaging, book covers and websites. Logo development and the creation of a house style is also part of graphic designing. Within the design process, the graphic designer makes decisions about the shape and form of the product, including composition, typography and the use of colours, illustrations and photos.

A *desktop publisher* makes documents ready for printing, such as books, magazines, brochures and internet publications.

An *illustrator* provides illustrations for texts prepared by someone else; for example, for a book, comic book, graphic novel, magazine, newspaper, folder, etc.

An *art director* is responsible for the creative process involved in the design and development of campaigns and other forms of visual expression, such as logos, advertisements and promotional material.

A *photographer* makes photographs with a camera and provides these to customers in digital or analogue form.

A *motion designer* animates images that have not been filmed as moving content.

A *film editor* is responsible for the processing, reworking and editing of sound and/or image material.

A *3D animator* or *3D modeler* creates moving images with the help of digital models.

A *web designer* designs websites that are functional and easy to use.

A *UX designer* improves the user experience of websites, software programmes, apps and games.

A *UI designer* or *user interface designer* designs the interface of a website (or some other digital environment), with the aim of maximising its functionality and user-friendliness.

A *creative director* takes creative decisions at a high level in the role as the overseer of the development of creative resources, such as advertisements, products, events or logos.

A *copywriter* writes advertising and other promotional texts for websites, folders, brochures, e-mailings, post mailings, sales leaflets, newsletters, staff magazines, etc.

Managers

A *brand manager* is responsible for the development of a brand and for bringing the products of that brand to market. The main task is to strengthen the brand in the perception of the outside world and to improve its overall market position.

A *marketing manager* or *marketeer* determines the organisation's strategic marketing policy, objectives and positioning. By researching the wishes and needs of relevant target groups, the marketing manager or marketeer develops marketing campaigns that increase the sale of the organisation's products and/or services.

A *communication manager* determines how information is communicated and exchanged throughout the entire organisation, including both communication between the organisation's employees (internal communication) and between the organisation and outside agencies (external communication).

A *corporate communication manager* carefully aligns all the different forms of communication within the organisation for the purpose of projecting the organisation's image clearly and effectively to all interested parties, both inside and outside said organisation.

A *project manager* leads a specific project from start to finish.

A *programme manager* coordinates a collection of temporary activities (projects and routines) to realise a number of unique objectives that would not have been possible without this coordination.

A *(key) account manager* is responsible for a number of the organisation's customers. This individual consults regularly with these customers about their needs and invests in a relationship with them in a variety of different ways.

An *entrepreneur* uses their own initiative and inventiveness to create a company, alone or in collaboration with others, for the purpose of generating income and profit.

A *business owner* or *company head* runs the company. This individual ensures that everyone in the company has a task and that those tasks are carried out efficiently and effectively.

A *head of marketing* or *marketing director* is responsible for providing direction, guidance and leadership to the marketing department, and controls that department's activities.

A *CEO* or *managing director* provides leadership for all the organisation's employees, ranging from the operational employees to the senior management team. This individual determines the strategy and policy of the organisation.

An *event manager* organises all different kinds of events.

A *vice-president of marketing and communication* is responsible for the supervision of an organisation's marketing activities and ensures the correct and efficient dissemination of information via digital platforms and other communication media.

A *business developer* coordinates research, sales and marketing activities. This individual shares insights with the sales and marketing departments, and translates innovations and improvements into customer benefits.

A *business manager* is an umbrella term for various management functions that involve responsibility for the supervision of elements of an organisation's daily operational activities.

A *sales manager* leads an organisation's sales teams and is responsible for the organisation's overall sales activities.

A *consultant* is an expert in a specific field and gives professional advice to organisations and individuals.

01

02

Business and design

The meaning of the word 'design' varies depending on the role it is intended to fulfill. Over the years, this role has varied considerably in the business world. Nowadays, design is not only used to make things aesthetically attractive, but also to bring about a change in mindset within companies and organisations. 'Design thinking' is the new buzz concept for our age. In the business context, this can find expression in various different kinds of design. We will look at three of them and some of their most important characteristics.

A —
Design = perfection

When most people hear the word 'design', they think of attractive things. In other words, design is about the creation of beauty and perfection. In this context, we can distinguish the following different categories of design:

- Graphic design
- Industrial design
- Advertising design
- Packaging design

Characteristics

These designs are made for specific end users. As such, they are not constantly amended or reworked. Instead, a particular kind of customer personality is taken as the starting point and every effort is made to provide a 'perfected' end product. The packaging for sweets is an example of this kind of design for specific end users, just as cars are also designed with a specific target public in mind. Of course, the clear definition of prospective customers and the type of design likely to appeal to them is equally crucial for advertisements.

Objective

The primary objective of the design is to be complete and perfect: the idea of a 1 millimetre deviation from the correct line or the use of a wrong shade of colour is wholly unacceptable! This means that it is important for this type of designer to pay the greatest possible attention to detail, so that the finished design/product displays a high degree of sophistication and expertise.
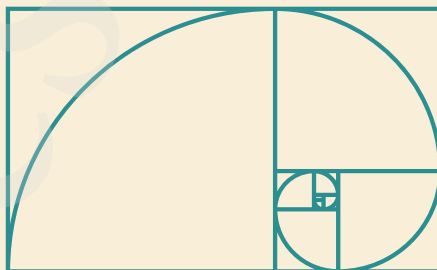
B —
Design = usability

This is a relatively new area of design that has emerged with the rapid development and expansion of the internet, apps and digital media. Such designs focus on functional matters. Typical examples include:

- Web design
- User interface design

Characteristics

These designs are made for non-specific users. Once they have initially been completed, they can be amended and improved subsequently. In other words, the design evolves over time. The nature of the internet and digital media means that it is difficult to predict when, where, how and by whom the design/product will be used. In the design field, the possibility of a greater number of future users is increasing at an exponential rate. As a result, it is important that the design should focus on long-term usability rather than perfection.

Objective

Nowadays, websites are omnipresent and can be accessed by different devices: personal computers, smartphones, tablets, and so on. Different dimensions, resolutions, screen types, etc. mean that it has become almost impossible to make the 'perfect' design with no variation. The priority with this type of design is therefore to create a user-friendly experience. The design must be capable of revision as technology and devices continue to evolve and the designer must evolve in similar fashion, by remaining fully aware of the latest technological advances and knowledge.
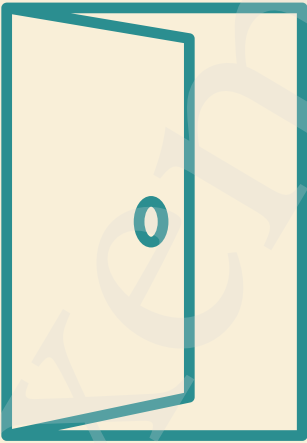
C —
Design = ingenuity

This form of design is the form that people usually mean when they use the word 'design'. Dealing cleverly with complexity is what designers have been doing since the start of the Industrial Revolution. Designers are specialised generalists, who have learnt how to accept the uncertainty of not knowing everything. They have developed a methodology that allows them to be result-oriented irrespective of the level of complexity involved. This complexity often ranges over a number of disciplines. The starting point for their activities is to create products and services that are as clear and as pleasant for the end user as they can possibly be. In the business world, companies often provide a combination of products and services for their customers. The design of these services and their proper alignment with the associated products is the challenge that faces any designer who wants to achieve the most desirable result for the people who use them. This type of design is directly linked to management and product planning:

- Service design
- User experience design
- Design thinking

Characteristics

These designs are made with a broad range of people in mind. User selection is the key to success: it is essential as a designer to understand the kinds of users you are dealing with and to be familiar with their needs. In this way, business and design can be seamlessly integrated. Products, services and experiences are designed with the intended user in mind. Following their introduction, these designs are more important for the organisation or company concerned than the designs that are permanent and complete.

The ultimate objective for this kind of design is to contribute to the functioning of companies and organisations. By applying the principles of design and involving end users in the design process, it becomes possible to create the most desirable solution for everyone involved.

01

03

Conflicts between managers and designers

Designers and managers have different perspectives. These differences, which we highlighted earlier, can lead to conflicts of various kinds.
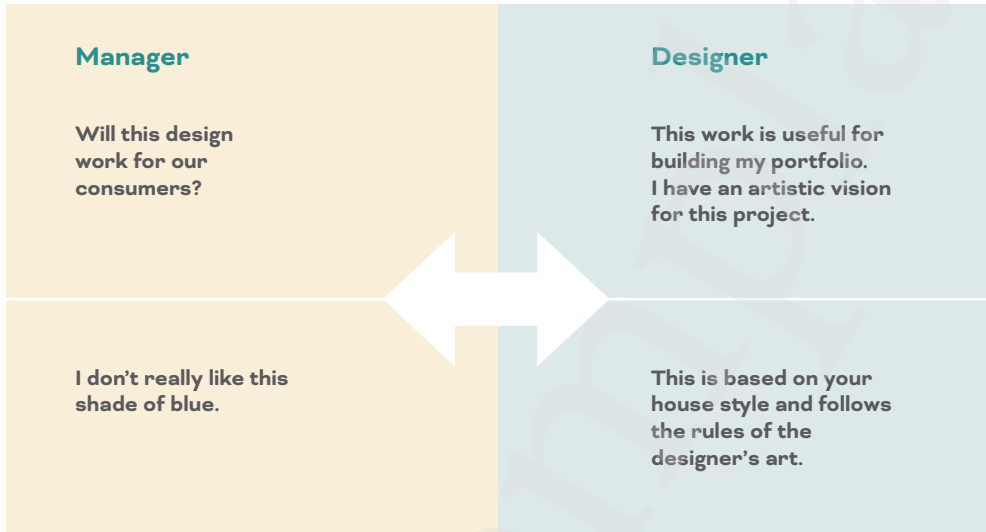
As a designer, you can sometimes get the feeling that your clients are trying to push you in the direction of an old-fashioned design, which the manager sees as the consistent perpetuation of the existing house style. In the eyes of many designers, managers know very little about the design profession and often ask unreasonable or even impossible things. As a result, they have a tendency to think that designers seldom deliver what they have been asked to provide. We have defined six different types of conflict between managers and designers.

	Manager	Designer
CONFLICT 1 Who is the designer working for?	Will this design work for our consumers? I don't really like this shade of blue.	This work is useful for building my portfolio. I have an artistic vision for this project. This is based on your house style and follows the rules of the designer's art.
CONFLICT 2 Strategy and process	Make sure the poster for our event looks good, so that it will boost sales. Could we get a number of options for this logo?	Your brand stands for innovative craftsmanship. The design will be ready in three weeks.
CONFLICT 3 Briefing, assumptions and interpretation	Can you quickly design a logo for my start-up? I see it as being clean and minimal. Just make something, it will all be fine.	You are looking for a solution for your visual identity. There is a good flow in this composition, because of the use of white space in the margins. Here are three mood boards. In which direction do you want to go?
CONFLICT 4 The screwdriver versus the tool chest	We want a brochure in the style of our competitor, but with our photos.	What image do you want to project and why do you need this?
CONFLICT 5 The need to communicate and convince	Is it not a good idea to put all our USPs on this poster? There is space here in the brochure to add some extra information.	Less is more. I have allowed the design to breathe through the use of white space. The title is enough to convince people, because it sounds mysterious.
CONFLICT 6 The chain of different stakeholders	I need to check this with my boss. We will discuss this in our steering group.	Thank you for your feedback. I will process it by the start of next week. What exactly does your manager want to achieve?

A —
Conflict 1:
Who is the designer
working for?

Manager	Designer
Will this design work for our consumers?	**This work is useful for building my portfolio. I have an artistic vision for this project.**
I don't really like this shade of blue.	**This is based on your house style and follows the rules of the designer's art.**

The world of design is an artistic world, full of great masters who everyone admires. In this sense, you can see design as a form of art. Designers of this kind consider their designs as masterpieces. So how exactly has design come to acquire this artistic dimension?

Most design studies focus on the visual or audiovisual arts. This means that these studies automatically have an artistic approach. Once you have graduated as a designer, there are a number of paths that you are free to choose. In essence, you can either opt to work for yourself or to work for clients. Those in the first category include true artists like Jackson Pollock, Vincent Van Gogh and Andy Warhol. The purpose of their work is to propagate their perspective on life in interesting designs. They do not provide a service to customers; they simply display their own unique view of the world. If you are able to make a success of this career choice, you can earn a great deal of money as an artist.

The other choice that a designer can make is to work for clients. Clients pay money for the designer's services, not only allowing the designer to make a living, but also making it possible for the designer to pursue a passion in a manner that involves artistic expression in different forms. Designers often have a portfolio, of which they are proud. This portfolio helps them to attract new clients. The work provided by these new clients therefore results in new works that can be added to the portfolio, which can then be shared with the world. In other words, when designers work for customers, they are also still thinking about the further development of their portfolio. As a result, they sometimes make decisions that allow them to further develop of their own style, rather than listening to the wants and needs of their clients.

Designers are frequently frustrated by their clients. Some professional designers even write articles about the fact that their clients have bad taste or fail to listen to advice, so that they often ruin perfectly good designs. In some cases, they say, a design can be made so bad through the client's interference that they are afraid to show the result to their colleagues and friends. In much the same vein, design courses regularly tell students that they will need to 'educate' their future clients. In reality, the key to success is to find the right balance between guiding your clients and listening to them. Even so, it often remains the case that designers lose their motivation during projects, because the clients fail to appreciate all their hard work.

The key question is, of course, this: who exactly is the designer working for? Is the designer working for a company, in which case their most important priority is to create recognisability by making consistent use of the company's existing corporate identity? Or are they working for the customers of the company, in which case the design needs to stimulate them since they will be coming into contact with it? A designer can also be directly commissioned for a project, which the commissioning party will wish to monitor and direct. These different angles of approach can lead to differing points of view about the design and also to different kinds of potential conflict.

Designers are experts, but they are not always seen as such by the people who employ or commission them. When designers present their work, this is often seen by the clients as an invitation to participate in the design decision-making process. They make suggestions about colour, composition, typography, and so on, without knowing anything about any of these matters. This generally leads to a weakening of the design. In particular, clients often give feedback about the design based on their personal opinions and prefer-ences, without taking account of either the existing house style or the likes and dislikes of their target group.

This is short-sighted, because managers should always want their designs to appeal to their target groups. But if a manager has doubts on this score, reasons will be sought for why the design, in the manager's opinion, fails to meet the brief. Unfortunately, the suggestions usually miss the mark and fail to address the core of the problem.

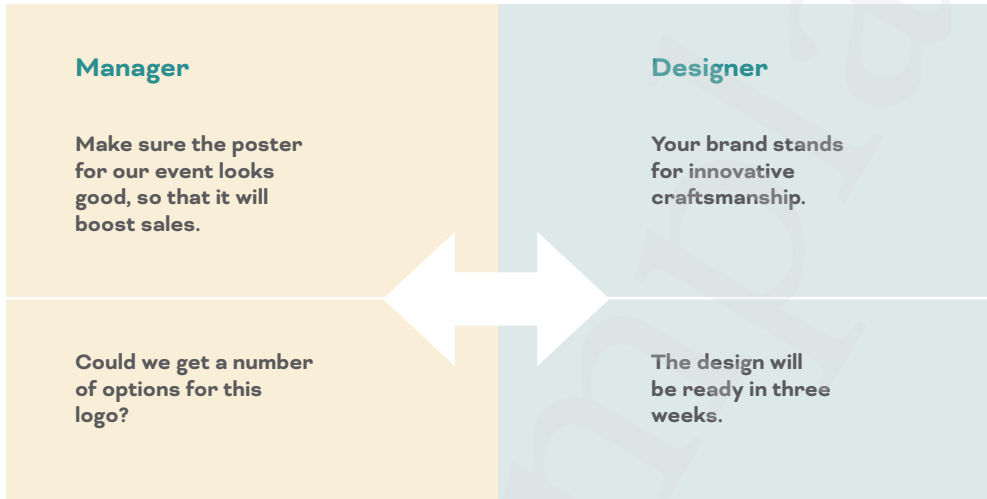Here are some real-life examples of the kinds of conflicts that can arise between designers and their clients.

Imagine that an architect writes a book for a publisher. A well-known designer is recruited to design the cover. This designer often collaborates with the publisher in question. However, the architect does not think that the cover proposed by the designer is appropriate. Of course, the designer has more experience with projects of this kind and remains convinced that the design is perfect. In other words, the designer thinks that their style is superior to the architect's suggestions. The publisher has also been very satisfied with the designer's work in the past. Result: the designer and the publisher are united in defence of the design, which will not be changed. The architect can either like it or lump it.

Another example? A client briefs the design team about a banner to use on social media for the promotion of an event. The banner is correctly designed in the house colours of the client's company. Unfortunately, the client does not like the final colour scheme and wants a different shade of blue instead of the house style blue. This time, the customer is king: the design is changed and it is now the designer who has to like it or lump it. But the design is weakened.

B —
Conflict 2:
Strategy and process

Manager	Designer
Make sure the poster for our event looks good, so that it will boost sales.	**Your brand stands for innovative craftsmanship.**
Could we get a number of options for this logo?	**The design will be ready in three weeks.**

It is important for managers to know what their brands stand for and how they want them to develop. This makes it easier for the designer to concentrate on the visual aspects of the brand. In this way, a clear strategy helps to give focus and direction to the design. This can follow one of two pathways. It is possible to opt for a new approach and for experimentation, or, alternatively, to opt for a design that is more in keeping with the brand's existing design contexts.

One of the mistakes that designers sometimes make is to immediately start work on the design, without first stopping to think about the design's purpose. If they fail to take the necessary time to understand this purpose, it will always remain no more than vague and abstract in their mind. If you appoint an architect to design your house, you will reasonably expect a discussion about the kind of house you want. Classic or modern in style? How many bedrooms? With a large kitchen or a large living room? Or both? The architect will think about who the house is being designed for and how they intend to use it. A house for a single person will be designed differently than a house for a family. In short, the architect investigates the purpose and defines criteria that will determine whether or not the design is successful.

Imagine that a designer is given a briefing to design a minimalist logo. Of course, this briefing also touches on a number of other relevant aspects, but the desire for something minimal is clear. The designer decides to focus on this aspect and concludes that this is a project where an experimental approach can be used. Consequently, a number of assumptions are made about what the ideal minimalist logo should look like. However, the client thinks that

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the resulting design is too simple and does not convey the original idea. Above all, it does not tell the story of their brand. In this case, the designer has focused on just a single aspect of the briefing and has based their design on this limited aspect alone. The design has not been linked to the client's strategic objectives.

It is well worth the effort for designers to define a clear process for their design tasks. This process will make it easier to identify the direction that the project needs to take. A typical conflict between managers and designers relates to the manager's desire for extra options and the designer's desire to take decisions that will eliminate options and bring clarity to the design. During the design process, the designer seeks to move from numerous options to as few options as possible. When this process takes place too quickly for the manager's liking or the range of choice is seen as being excessively limited, a conflict may arise, with the manager asking for more options to be reinstated.

Here is another example. During the design of a logo for a client, we are in the third round of iteration. The two entrepreneurs who commissioned the logo have already made a number of different choices about its style. After this third round, they telephone to ask us to put forward a number of new proposals. They also ask if these proposals can move in a completely different direction, as though we had not already completed all the necessary steps of the design process! 'Start with a clean sheet of paper and just do a few things at random.' For a designer, this is the worst possible kind of feedback. You cannot do anything with it. All you can feel is the clients' anxiety when it comes to making choices. As a solution, we suggest working with mood boards that reflect the direction they want their branding to take.

A brewery wants to develop a new branding for its beer bottles. At the briefing with the designer, it is not clear for whom the bottles are intended. The designer asks a number of questions. 'What is the target group? What is the brewery's mission? What does it stand for?' The answers include: 'Our beer is for everyone who likes it. It can be drunk by young and old alike. However, they have to be older than 18 years of age.' This is a highly challenging commission for the designer, since there is no clear story that reaches out to the target group. However, by using a good process it is possible for the designer to create a branding that connects with this group. The designer presents a number of mood boards, but the brewer does not feel they represent the desired aesthetic. Finally, the designer decides to design the bottles first, and then move from there towards a particular branding. In this case, confidence in the designer's process was able to make the design process easier.

If a company has no clear idea about what it stands for, who its target group is and why its customers buy its products, it is very difficult to make a design that appeals to the needs of those customers.

C —
Conflict 3: Briefing, assumptions and interpretation

Manager	Designer
Can you quickly design a logo for my start-up?	You are looking for a solution for your visual identity.
I see it as being clean and minimal.	There is a good flow in this composition, because of the use of white space in the margins.
Just make something, it will all be fine.	Here are three mood boards. In which direction do you want to go?

A manager asks as designer to make 'something creative'. But it can sometimes happen that the manager's motivation for having a design is unclear. This leads to much unnecessary work on both sides and a high cost at the end of the road.

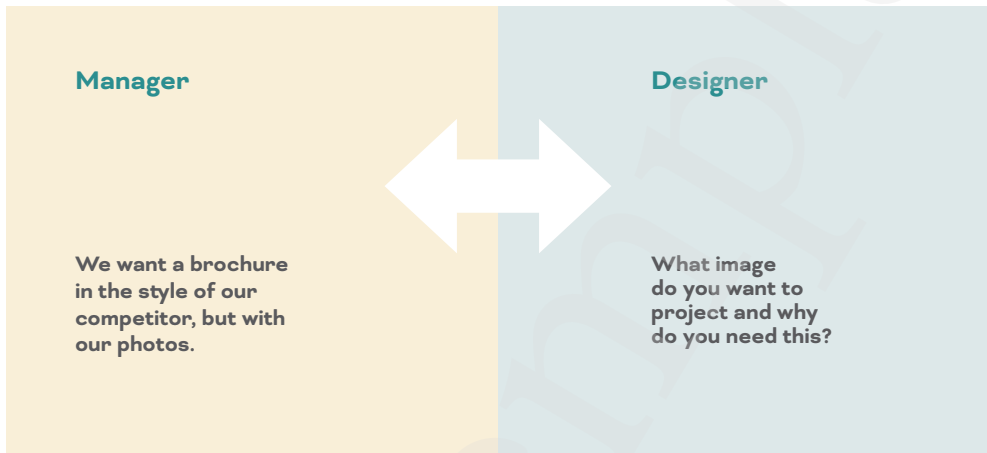A good design looks good, but above all it also has a purpose. This purpose must be communicated during the briefing. A poster (to stick with an example we have used before) can be designed in a hundred different styles and contain lots of different messages. The client needs to let the designer know what message needs to be conveyed. Being creative simply for the sake of being creative gets you nowhere.

An additional complication is the fact that designers have plenty of professional jargon that they frequently use in their discussions with clients. This intimidates the clients and they feel almost compelled to join in with the designer's use of such language, even though they do not know how to use the jargon terms correctly. They do not want to appear stupid, so they just pretend they know what they are talking about. This means that, as a designer, you often hear what you want to hear during discussions with clients, so you base your actions on certain assumptions, without really understanding what your client wants.

A number of businesspeople have written a brochure for an event that is taking place next week. An external event bureau has organised the look and feel for that event, but does not have enough time to also make the brochure. The manager of the project decides to call in a graphic designer. This designer needs to quickly become familiar with the event style and is working to a very tight deadline. If the designer had been involved in the project from the beginning, they would have been better able to anticipate what was needed, which would allow them to achieve the desired result faster, better and more effectively. Briefing designers when it is almost too late simply makes your project less efficient.

Of course, companies that engage designers for the first time cannot be expected to know just how many hours and how much effort is involved in good design work. Designers consult with others, take part in briefings, carry out research, immerse themselves in the subject, analyse the client's competitors, work out different ideas, develop various concepts, and so on. Quality takes time. During the briefing, it is important that a designer informs their clients about the different steps that are involved in the project's design process. If designers are transparent and explain their processes, clients will better understand the price for the designer's work and the length of the proposed time frame.

D —

Conflict 4:
The screwdriver
versus
the tool chest

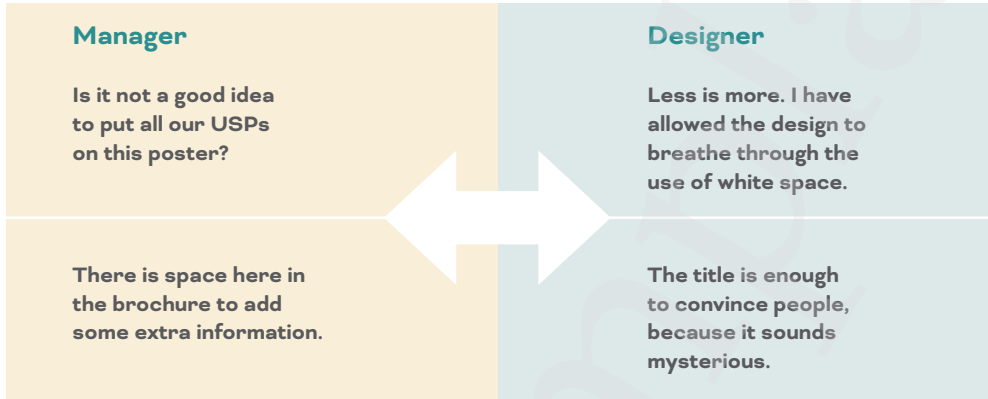| Manager	Designer
We want a brochure in the style of our competitor, but with our photos.	What image do you want to project and why do you need this?

Some managers know exactly what they want. Other managers are looking for a creative partner. In the first case, the designer is simply an implementer. You can see the designer as a screwdriver and the clients indicate which screw needs to be screwed in. However, a designer can also be like a tool chest. The manager has a communication need and the designer is given the freedom to decide how this communication will take place.

A manager asks a designer to make a brand book in the style of an existing brand, but using photos of their company's own brand. In this case, the designer simply implements the manager's instructions.

For the Panos bakery chain, a communications agency is asked to devise a creative and fun campaign. The brand manager of Panos makes clear that, above all, it is important that the focus should be set on the products. Wishing to take no risks of an oversight, the brand manager ticks off the products on a list. The rest is up to the designer.

Conflict 5:
The need to communicate and convince

Manager	Designer
Is it not a good idea to put all our USPs on this poster?	**Less is more. I have allowed the design to breathe through the use of white space.**
There is space here in the brochure to add some extra information.	**The title is enough to convince people, because it sounds mysterious.**

Managers, entrepreneurs and marketeers feel the need to communicate with their target group. Graphic design is one of the ways to carry out this communication. Often, it is relatively easy to communicate a message, but managers frequently find it necessary to add extra details, in an attempt to add even more conviction to that message.

In an age when an endless series of bombastic visuals compete to attract our attention, the comeback of the 'less is more' trend in graphic design is like a long-awaited breath of fresh air.
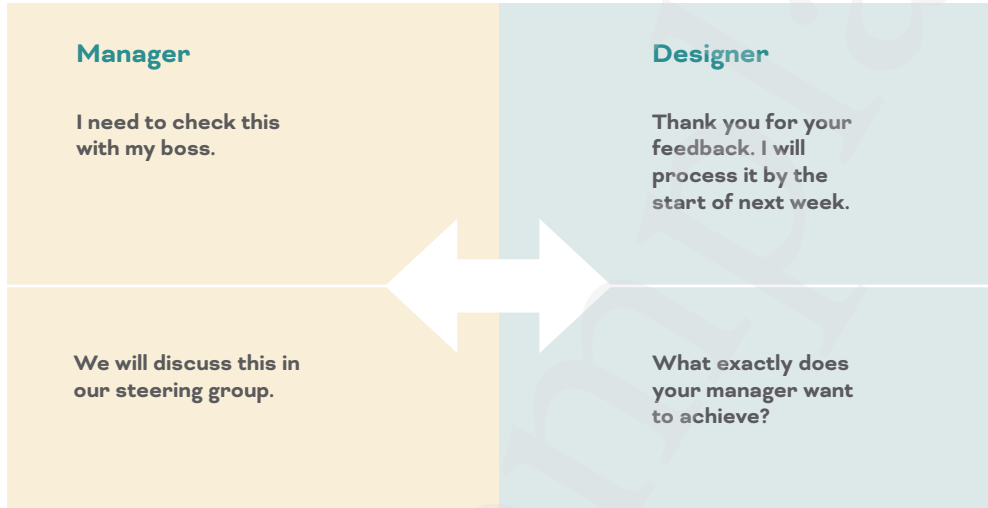
Contrary to what people generally assume, much more goes in to making an effective minimal design than you might think at first glance. The applicable 'rules' for this kind of design seem simple, but developing the skill to tell a lot with just a little is a process that takes years of research and practice.

In graphic design, simplicity plays a crucial role in attracting the attention of the viewer and helping them to understand the message. The fewer the number of elements in the mix, the greater the likelihood that the design will not only look good, but will also be able to communicate its message effectively. If a visual element negatively affects the legibility or the usability of a design product, it should be removed or replaced.

One of the most intriguing design elements, which is particularly important for minimalist design, is negative space. Although this space is usually white, it can also be filled with other colours. Minimalism requires that plenty of negative space should be planned within the design, as a way to balance and emphasise the other elements.

Of course, the client has to pay for every page that is printed. This explains why managers often want to cram as much information as possible into as little space as possible. They feel the urge to communicate more and more to their customers in an effort to add extra conviction to their message. In this way, however, the essential purpose of communication can be lost. This creates a conflict of interests.

F —
Conflict 6:
The chain of different stakeholders

Manager	**Designer**
I need to check this with my boss.	Thank you for your feedback. I will process it by the start of next week.
We will discuss this in our steering group.	What exactly does your manager want to achieve?

A project with different stakeholders is always challenging. Everyone involved has their own opinion. It is the designer's task to untangle all these different opinions. This is more difficult if the designer is not able to communicate directly with each of the stakeholders. This means that someone else will need to sell the designer's ideas within the company or organisation. The relevant feedback is collected and then passed back to the designer. But because the designer is not able to communicate directly, it is harder to assess the possible agendas of the people in charge.

This is a situation comparable with the children's game in which each child attempts to pass on a message from the front of the row to the back. Each time the message is passed, it is subtly changed, as if by magic! Some children cannot remember all the details of the message, and so they make small adjustments of their own. In addition, there is also interference created by the noise that comes from children in other parts of the row. And it is exactly the same in the business world. When professionals communicate, details can often get lost amidst the complexity of a briefing. People place different emphases at different times. Disruptive elements create interference by pushing parts of their own personal agendas. In this way, the message become subject to a great deal of noise, so that there is a risk its essence will be lost.

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