Design Leadership and Management

A Case Study in Singapore

Garry Tan and Anne Chapman

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Garry Tan
University of Western Australia, Australia and
Nanyang Polytechnic, Singapore

and

Anne Chapman
University of Western Australia, Australia

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACCA	Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts
ATLAS.TI	Atlas.ti Qualitative Data Analysis Software
ADH	Asian Design Hub
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CAQDAS	Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CIDS	Creative Industries Development Strategy
DCMS	Department of Culture, Media, and Sports (UK)
DLDP	Design Leadership Development Programme
DLT	Design Leadership Transition
DC	Design Consultants
DE	Design Entrepreneurs
DM	Design Managers
DSG	DesignSingapore Report
DSG-2	DesignSingapore Report 2
DSI	DesignSingapore Initiative
ECO	Design Eco-system
ERC	Economic Review Committee
FDI	Foreign Domestic Investments
ICSID	International Council of Societies of Industrial Design
MCD	Ministry of Community Development
MICA	Ministry of Information, Culture and the Arts
MNC	Multinational Corporations
MTI	Ministry of Trade and Industry
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RCR	Renaissance City Report
RCR 2.0	Renaissance City Report 2.0
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SSIC	Singapore Standard Industrial Classification
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation
WFT	War for Talents

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

This book reports research aimed at developing understanding of design leaders' transition to design leadership and management positions in Singapore. Design is a key sector of the cultural and creative industries, which are of great consequence to social and economic well-being both internationally and in Singapore. The Singapore government has transformed Singapore from being an information-driven industry in the early 1980s, to a knowledge-based society in the early 2000s and finally, arriving at a thriving creative economy (MICA, 2008). Singapore's transformation has highlighted creativity as a source of strategic advantage in present-day managerial and political lexicon (de Fillippi, Grabher, & Jones, 2007).

This study is located in context of the development of the creative industries in Singapore, with a particular focus on the design sector (MICA, 2003). The government's creative industries policy seeks to position Singapore as a global hub of multimedia and design capabilities. Design leadership is critical to this enterprise. This book seeks to inform policy and practice in design and deepen knowledge of design leadership. The challenge for the study was to review design leadership transition in Singapore in light of the Asia Pacific war for talents and Singapore's drive to become the design hub of Asia. The research was conducted from 2009 to 2015, being framed by the Design Singapore Initiative (DSI) Phase II, a national collaborative strategy to promote and develop design excellence.

For the purpose of this study, design leaders are individuals who find themselves in a position of leadership or who choose to lead in a design team or design organisation. Design leaders act as design advocates, promoters, or interpreters that connect and support design expertise according to the company's agenda and competencies. Their role is to direct and control, eliminate uncertainties, deal with variances from the grand plan, understand the whole system, see its connections, foresee the responses of people and design and execute appropriate interventions. Similarly, design leadership is defined as having the aim of helping organisations envision the future and ensures that design is used to turn those visions into reality. In contrast, design management's focus is on the management and integration of assets, activities, resources, and processes to foster creativity and originality to create sensible solutions that achieve corporate objectives.

The overarching goal of the research was to develop theory on design leaders' transition to design leadership and management positions in Singapore. To this end, the qualitative study sought the experiences and perspectives of industrial design leaders and produced rich descriptions of their transition to leadership and management positions. Theory was generated in the form of theoretical propositions. Based on the empirical and theoretical outcomes of the research, recommendations are made later in this book for professional and educational practice, policy and further research in design leadership to benefit the industrial design community in Singapore. Importantly, this study provided design leaders a voice that "explains the significance of a Design Singapore Initiative (DSI) under the rubric of the Creative Industries" (Lee, 2004, p. 13).

The remainder of this chapter is presented in four main sections. The first section provides a brief outline of the background and context of the study, highlighting the significance of Singapore as a case for investigating design leadership in the creative industries. The second section presents the rationale for the study. The third section describes the key concepts and definitions employed in this research and book. The fourth section provides an overview of the research method. The chapter concludes with a structured overview of the chapters to follow.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Singapore's successes and achievements in education are well documented (Gopinathan, 2007; Holden & Hamblett, 2007; Pedersen, Oster, & Truelsen, 2011; Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2002). However, according to some scholars, its development ethos and survival ideology had previously marginalized the development of arts and culture resulting in a labour force that is not suitable for the creative economy (Holden & Hamblett, 2007; Low, 2002; Ooi, 2010; Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2002). Singapore's creative economy has subsequently emerged as the key differentiation strategy for integrating the humanities, business, and technology to enable the governance and 'solution-finding' of this nation state. The nation's strategic transition to the creative industries marks a dramatic shift to an economy that makes use of the knowledge of its citizens to generate value and prosperity (Yue, 2006).

The Renaissance City Report: Culture and the Arts in Renaissance Singapore was accepted and unveiled in Parliament in 2000. The report proposed six strategies to achieve the goal of making Singapore a world-class city of arts and culture in the 21st century … (i) develop a strong arts and cultural base; (ii) develop flagship and major arts companies; (iii) recognise and groom talent; (iv) provide good infrastructure and facilities; (v) go international; and (vi) develop an arts and cultural "renaissance" economy (MITA, 2000).

In 2003, the Creative Industries Development Strategy (CIDS) was released. It categorised the creative economy into three groups: Arts and culture, design, and media. Policies associated with each group sought to promote the growth of Singapore's creative economy with a view to making the nation into a "New Asia

Creative Hub" (DSG, 2009, p. 17). The Design Singapore Initiative was launched in 2003 as a key platform of the CIDS. The outcomes of this initiative are: For Singapore to be a leading design hub in Asia; to evolve a distinctive design and brand identity for Singapore products and services; for design excellence to be a competitive advantage for local enterprises; and to create a pervasive design culture to raise the general level of design awareness and discourse. The overall objective is to create an awareness of effective design that integrates into all aspects of business, leisure, recreation, public service, and education in Singapore (MTI, 2003). The present study was conducted over the duration of the Design Singapore Initiative (2009 to 2015). These CIDS and Design Singapore Initiative, including its phases of implementation are described in detail in Chapter 3 of this book. It is worth noting that the Design Singapore Initiative, however, focused on new studio leaders, studios with excellent practices, and the wide-spread adoption of design thinking in Singapore companies instead of a focus on policies in design leadership and management as a national strategy.

Within the above context, Singapore is significant as a geographical area for research into the creative industries because of its status as an 'intelligent' city; the world's first digital economy. It is also one of the most Western-oriented, economically successful and globalised cities in the world (Brown, 1998; Chong, 2006; Chua, 1998; Gopinathan, 2007; Holden & Hamblett, 2007; Lim, 1999; Yue, 2006). Globalisation, Information Communication Technology (ICT), and the nation's ambitions to be a knowledge-based economy make human capital, especially intellectual capital more critical to Singapore than physical capital (Low, 2002; MICA, 2003; MTI, 2002). Further, Singapore is special in the region because it is the only country in Asia to harness the shift to the creative economy as a lasting national cultural policy. Singapore is a distinctive choice for this study because of its focus on human resources for survival, and its competitiveness is imperative as compared with other Asian nations. Singapore's greatest resource is the creative abilities of its citizens (MTI, 2002, 2003); design plays a central role in developing this resource.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Alan Topalian (1990) defined a design leader in two ways, as an organisation's position in the market, or an individual who finds himself in a position of leadership or who chooses to lead. This paper focuses on Alan Topalian's second definition of an individual as a design leader. In this light, design leaders are individuals who find themselves in a position of leadership or who choose to lead in a design team or design-driven organisation. They act as design advocates, promoters, or interpreters that connect and support design expertise according to the company's agenda and competencies. Their role is to direct and control, eliminate uncertainties, deal with variances from the grand plan, understand the whole system, see its connections, foresee the responses of people and design and execute appropriate interventions

(Karp & Helgø, 2008). As such, design leaders require the continuous mandate to lead their subordinates in initiating constantly evolving changes in an ever-changing environment.

The aim of design leadership is to help organisations envision the future and to ensure that design is used to turn those visions into reality (Nam & Jung, 2008). In contrast, Design management's focus is on the management and integration of assets, activities, resources, and processes to foster creativity and originality to create sensible solutions that achieve corporate objectives. In this light, the principal source of poor design is poor design management. Poor design management only becomes apparent when the lack of design knowledge and experience limits the progress of a design project or the organisation (Topalian, 1984, 1990). Alan Topalian suggested that for a more professional approach, it is necessary to bring the design function into focus and explain the demands of efficient design management practice (1984). However, there is little research dealing with the transition to leadership and management positions within the general management knowledge domain. To add, there is a dearth of research in the design knowledge domain, particularly in the context of designers' career trajectory and particularly in the context of design leadership in Singapore.

In general, scholars have welcomed the age of design management (Walton, 2007), however, this appears to be centred mostly in Europe and the United States, where design management practices are more established. In Asia, especially Singapore, there is insufficient discussion on design management practices. This book is an attempt to address these gaps by providing empirical evidence of the phenomenon of transition to design leadership and management positions in a Singapore setting and by using qualitative research to provide an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon. The existing corpus of research in the transition to design leadership and management position is severely limited. However, literature within the generic design management domain has revealed five interconnected research gaps that led to five themes that frame this research.

The first research gap identified by scholars highlights issues with the transition to design leadership and management, especially problems experienced by design managers at the middle level (Gorb, 1992). According to Gorb, the hardest task is to educate newcomers to senior design management ranks, who through many years of work, are conditioned by the attitudes of their immediate supervisors. He says:

> *...the task of education continues as newcomers join the senior management ranks. At the bottom levels, among young people with fast-track careers such as MBAs, there has been similar success, but the effort continues with every new class. While these people will be working for many years, their effectiveness is inevitably conditioned by the attitudes of their immediate bosses, the middle managers. It is among this group of middle managers that the hardest task remains. Successful managers find it difficult to accept that they need a new expertise; less successful ones find it difficult to take new ideas on board.*

> *In-house programmes are perhaps the best way to educate these people, but insufficient resources make it a slow process.* (Gorb, 1992, p. 21)

This problem with middle level managers is also identified by Alan Topalian, but with an emphasis on design managers who have had little prior design or design management experience. Alan Topalian points out that these managers at functional or tactical level often think that competencies other than design, such as in marketing, production or project management transfers easily into an equivalent competence in managing design, however they are often uncomfortable when it comes to handling design projects, resulting in a superficial approach with indifferent results (Topalian, 1984, 2002). These problems with middle level managers in the design management domain have led to concerns over the transition to design leadership and management positions. These concerns, discussed further in Chapter 3, include the challenges in dealing with the shift towards team-based and temporary work, increasingly flexible and gate-keeping roles, and a greater focus on relationship-based work.

The second research gap highlights the need to improve design and designer education, especially design professional development, and cross-disciplinary perspectives from design academia, and design practice. According to Yang, You, and Chen (2005), design education had failed because the capabilities of design graduates globally are not up to a level expected by employers (Yang et al., 2005). To add, there is an increasing need for talents that have an international perspective and in-depth experience working in multinational corporations (Ooi, 2010). The Singapore government supports the training of more designers and allowing a greater influx of global design talents into Singapore (MTI, 2002). The challenge for Singapore now is the shortage of locally trained talents with an international outlook and an appreciation of the Singaporean perspective.

Also, according to Rausch (2005), there is the need for professional development to draw a distinction between the development of design leaders from the education about design leadership. He points out that potential design leaders may learn of leadership and motivation theories that provide an array of insights, however they may not realise how these insights apply to a specific decision (Rausch, 2005). This can be a disadvantage for companies that urgently need design leadership in an increasingly competitive environment like Singapore. There is also the need for cross-disciplinary perspectives between design education and design practice (Wolf, Davis, & Vogel, 2002). According to Wolf et al.:

> *Current undergraduate design programmes do not make students aware of the challenges of design management, nor do they describe the types of management that exist. Graduate programmes are not much better. Leaders in education and industry must recognize this gap in education and work together to correct it.* (2002, p. 36)

These problems with design education identified by scholars in the design management domain led to concerns about design leadership development and the

design leadership pipeline in general. These concerns are further addressed in the literature review in Chapter 3, which includes a discussion on the ephemeral nature of design and the need for champions in design leadership and management, the need for continuous upgrading and lifelong learning, and the need for accreditation and recognition for professional development in the design industry.

The third research gap highlights concerns with talent management, with a focus on the war for talent in the Asia Pacific, and the need to develop studios with excellent practices in Singapore. Singapore's conversion from an information-driven industry, to a knowledge-based society, to a flourishing creative economy today (MICA, 2008), emphasises the significance of creativity in its strategy for economic growth and survival. Globalisation has fuelled the aggressive economic growth in Asia and promoted talent mobility (Florida, 2005, 2008; Senge, 2006). This has accelerated the talent brain drain because "the best and the brightest talents often find attractive compensation packages overseas because of global competition for the best talent," this results in severe "talent shortages" in China and the Asia Pacific region (Ooi, 2010, p. 25). For Singapore, there is an increasing need for talents that have international perspective and experience working in multinational corporations (Ooi, 2010). For some scholars, Singapore's development ethos and survival ideology had marginalized the development of arts and culture resulting in a labour force that is not suitable for the creative economy (Holden & Hamblett, 2007; Low, 2002; Ooi, 2010; Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2002). Research identifies the need for leaders to develop an excellent design studio culture (MTI, 2003). This studio design culture should encourage cultural sensitivity, to overcome cultural disadvantages, and to be more inclusive and urgently encourage diversity in the workplace (Bassett-Jones, 2005; Chiu, 2001; Jacobs, 2005; Littrell, 2002; Quaglieri, Penney, & Waldner, 2007; Vaiou, Konstantatos, & Siatitsa, 2009). These concerns on talent management are further addressed in the literature review chapter, which discusses the war for talents, the need for designer career trajectories, and good practices in design management; issues addressed in this book.

The fourth research gap highlights concerns related to the design community and design practice, especially in light of the failure shown by the top-down design leadership style and the need for new studio leaders. According to Clews (2008), the top-down leadership style is a source of concern in managing design as it would not produce design outcomes of the level of rigour, consistency, attention to detail or within the scope of a bottom-up approach driven by the designers (Clews, 2008). Similarly, Gorb observed that there is a difference between the working styles of a designer and design leader. A designers' working style is practical, with a strong focus on the "how" of problem solving (Gorb, 1992). According to Gorb, designers are inductive in bringing business value and emphasise on the importance of "capable" educational routes to a successful working life. For design leaders, their style of working is theoretical with a focus on the "why" of the problem (Gorb, 1992, p. 20). Design leaders bring business value by seeking knowledge deductively and emphasising the importance of "reflective" educational routes to a successful

working life (Gorb, 1992, p. 20). In light of the failure of top-down leadership and the differences in working styles between designers and design leaders, it is unsurprising that scholars in the creative industry suggest the need for a new breed of global generalists (Kyung Won Chung, 1998; Gibson & Kong, 2005; Porcini, 2009; Yukl, 2013). The literature highlights the fragmented design eco-system, the significance of the structure of the design community, and the future of design leadership being highly relational in nature.

The fifth research gap addressed in this book focuses on concerns with design policy and strategy, especially with the impact of design policy in Singapore, and how they help develop a stronger design culture in Singapore (DSG, 2009). Design and design leaders need an environment that supports both creativity-nurturing situations together with opportunities for stimulating creative conflicts with competitive co-workers and an exposure to complex jobs led by design leaders who display supportive non-controlling styles (Cummings & Oldham, 1997). This environment must constantly adjust and adapt the context to maximize the innovation potential and creativity of designers and ensure that the essence of their work is not swayed by the times or be merely novel solutions (Chan, 2001). Singapore is one of the few countries globally to set tangible objectives for developing its creative economy. This is despite it being the newest entrants in the race towards being a cultural and creative city in Asia and the world. These concerns regarding design policy and its strategy are further addressed in Chapter 3, in its contextual review of the creative industries in Singapore from their creation to the latest Design Singapore Initiative.

As has been noted, there is a dearth of research into design leadership and management in the context of Singapore. By canvassing the views of design managers, design consultants, and design entrepreneurs in Singapore, this book will make a significant contribution to understanding the current transition to design leadership and management positions in Singapore.

KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

Definition of Design

Design is ephemeral/design helps businesses. There is no single authoritative definition of the word design (Findeli, 2001; Jevnaker, 2000). In fact Findeli said, "there are almost as many different definitions of design and design process as there are writers about design" (2001, p. 295). As such, it is helpful to return to the root-word for a clear definition. In German, design or Gestaltung means "the creation of form," while in English it refers to "the conception, or creation of mental plan for an object, action or project" (Jevnaker, 2000, p. 104). Common to these German and English root-word meanings, is the meaning that design transforms existing solutions into preferred ones. What should be noted is that the definition of design changes with time, according to markets and business strategies, consumers and their lifestyle needs, and technological trends (Findeli, 2001; Jevnaker, 2000). What

is significant about design is that it helps businesses to brand, grow and compete (de Mozota, 2003; Evans & Shaw, 2004).

Design mergers with moral and ethical considerations. Latour (2000) states that design is a humbling process because a designer only adds to an idea and does not facilitate foundational changes. Design, he adds, demands that the designer have an eye for details, and requires that s/he creates meaning through that process. Therefore design is almost always never new but remedial. Latour argues that "by expanding design so that it is relevant everywhere, designers take up the mantle of morality as well" (Bohemia, 2000, p. 6). Because "materiality" and "morality" is "coalescing," designers will be subjected to the ethical critique of his clients and peers (Bohemia, 2000, p. 5).

Design defines products and/or services. Ralph and Wand (2009) however, provide the clearest, most thorough and holistic definition of design to date. They define design (noun) as "a specification of an object, manifested by an agent, intended to accomplish goals, in a particular environment, using a set of primitive component, satisfying a set of requirements, subject to constraints" (Ralph & Wand, 2009, p. 109). Ralph and Wand also defined design as a transitive verb; "to create a design, in an environment (where the designer operates)" (Ralph & Wand, 2009, p. 109). They cite six classes of design objects identified as the outcomes of design. The design outcomes are "physical artefacts" (e.g. single component or composites), "processes" (e.g. business workflows), "symbolic systems" (e.g. programming language), "symbolic scripts" (e.g. essays, graphic models, software), "laws, rules and policies" (e.g. criminal code), and "human activity systems" (e.g. design projects, committees, and operas) (Ralph & Wand, 2009, p. 111).

Design involves industrial production. In the context of Singapore's creative industry and of the present study, the definition of design and its outcomes are limited to physical artefacts, processes, and human activity systems. Anecdotal evidence shows that many designers and design leaders in Singapore are holding onto a traditional Bauhaus view of the definition of design. As such, design is very much concerned with the pressure for industrial production and its constant focus on the fitness of an object for purpose and market (Cross, 1983).

Definition of Industrial Design (ID)

Product design a sub-field of industrial design. According to Erlhoff and Marshall (2007), the terms product design and industrial design, or more accurately industrial and consumer product design, are used interchangeably because they ultimately both have similar objectives, processes, technologies and spectrum of output possibilities. However, product design is generally considered a sub-field of industrial design because of a perceived craft-based approach to the design process (Jevnaker, 2000).

Similarly, the term industrial design is seen as somewhat outmoded with its historical links to the Industrial Revolution. To add, the term "industrial" also implies a "greater emphasis on the manufacturing aspects" in the product development process (Jevnaker, 2000, p. 310).

Characteristics of industrial design 1: multidisciplinary. Industrial design has two major characteristics. Firstly, it is multidisciplinary. It consists of considerations for form, material, construction, ergonomics, user convenience and friendliness, safety, produce-ability, reliability, serviceability, user instructions, aesthetics, packaging, transportability, point-of-sale display, cost-effectiveness, quality, product image, corporate image and ultimately, user satisfaction and profitability for the manufacturer (Topalian, 1986, p. 53). Multidisciplinary approaches to problem solving, Alan Topalian, (1986, p. 57) warns, must go beyond multidisciplinary teams to multidisciplinary thinking or "integrated" thinking (Topalian, 1986, p. 57).

Characteristics of industrial design 2: culture, innovation and technology. Secondly, industrial design is concerned with culture, innovation, and the humanization of technologies (ICSID, 2008). The International Council of Societies for Industrial Design (ICSID), the world governing body for industrial design societies, expanded on the existing definitions of industrial design, describing it as the central factor of innovative humanisation of technologies and the crucial factor of cultural and economic exchange and a creative activity whose aim is to establish the multifaceted qualities of objects, processes, services and their systems in whole life cycles (ICSID, 2008).

Singapore: industrial design is object design. In Singapore, the Ministry of Information Communications and the Arts (MICA), the governing body that oversees the creative industries in Singapore classifies industrial design as object design (Pinnow, 2011). Object design is the broadest term in listing all activities related to industrial design but is not suitable in describing activities specifically related to industrial design. In this book the term industrial design is preferred over the lengthier and more accurate term industrial and consumer product design due to its wider acceptance internationally.

Management of Design and Design Management

10 Assumptions about design management. According to Alan Topalian (2002), there are ten assumptions found within design management. The first assumption is that design is a strategic resource, having the ability to create wealth due to its capacity to ideate and deliver products and services to exceed customers' needs and aspirations. Second, design management assumes that innovation is vital for global players and, whether consciously or not, innovation plays a part in all design. Third, design management assumes that design leadership generates ideas that reveal tangible market