Diversity management: Professional occupations working together

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ABSTRACT

Due to globalization, greater mobility of employees and unceasing competition, organizations face the challenge of managing diversity within their workforce. Main flow of research analyzes the influence of national culture on work efficiency (and ethnic discrimination), but the aim of the paper is to show the challenge of making two distinct professional occupations, represented by managers and designers, work together effectively and creatively. It seems that professional paths of management and design specialists intersect in more aspects than just product design and yet both groups of professionals develop different sets of skills and competencies which makes them follow certain behavioral patterns and feel more comfortable in different settings. The paper considers literature review and sufficient research data.

Keywords: Design, Creativity, Diversity, Organizational Culture

1. INTRODUCTION

There is evidence that successful business requires strong collaboration between various groups of professionals that often create distinctive subcultures within one organization. The quest for creative and innovative solutions in all business spheres leads to managing intellectual capital and building diversified project teams. [Jelinkova, Jirincova, 2015; Gross-Gołacka, 2016; Yang, Konrad, 2011] It is not uncommon for managers and marketers to work

closely with professionals devoted to more creative fields like the designers. However, as the objectives and priorities of both designers and managers differ a lot and these differences stem from the contexts they are embedded, organizations face a great challenge of how to structure this cross-unit collaboration and how to direct the focus of the team.

On a day-to-day basis groups of management and design specialists must face different challenges and limitations, which make them choose different success factors, arrive at crucial decisions in a different manner and perceive their collaboration from a different angle. [Bayram, 2013; Calabretta, Montaña, Iglesias, 2008; Gardien, Gilsing, 2013; Liedtka, Ogilvie, 2012] As a result, the basic assumptions they have on the other party, may be biased. What is more, this may lead to misunderstandings and unnecessary debates on the importance of any of those fields. The article assumes that better understanding of these assumptions may create more partnership-like atmosphere and that companies shall learn how to leverage on the existing differences. In effect, it aims at studying the fundamentals of the differences to show how to manage them. Learning the assumptions and expectations of both groups of professionals shall improve understanding why their collaboration may be complicated at some points. The analysis of how designers and managers perceive each other, what are their expectations of the other and how they foresee their relationships to be built within organizational structure may help to understand why they work, behave, and even communicate in a different manner. Based on these insights, recommendations may be drawn to enhance their understanding, which can bring to more cohesion and synergy. In effect, it may lead to a fruitful diversity management. To sum up, the paper tries to figure out:

- Can occupational subcultures strongly influence diversity management in organizations?
- What are the key variables that distinguish the professional approach of designers and managers?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Creativity strives for gathering various points of view and working on discrepancies and differences. The more homogenous a team, the greater chances of thinking in a similar manner and groupthink. Once the team is built by members of various backgrounds and experiences, the collaboration would be more challenging, but might result in a multiple of options and in the end lead to the optimal solution. Gathering a diversified team is not enough to guarantee creative outcomes. The team members need to possess a specific set of competencies that will allow thinking outside the box and that will build on diversity.

There are countless definitions of diversity. [Kopeć, 2014; Kopeć, 2016; Wiśniewska, 2016] In this paper we assume that diversity is a "variation of social and cultural identities of people existing together in a defined setting, and diversity management deals with creating conditions that minimize its potential to be a performance barrier while maximizing its potential to enhance organizational performance". [Linehan, Hanappi-Egger, 2006, p. 219-220] The following concept can be a starting point for defining the science of diversity management. To manage diversity effectively, organizations need to be able to identify and explain various human behaviors, which means they need to be able to compare organizational practices implemented by representatives of different countries, divisions and departments, to understand interactions between them and to give guidelines how to cooperate

with colleagues and clients who come from other cultures and subcultures. [Browayes, Price, 2015, p. 16]

To cope with diversity in effective manner, organizations shall instill certain values which would lessen the resistance to diversity and increase tolerance for differences. In this light, a multicultural organization has a culture with core values that respect and empower the full diversity of its members. Those values support and involve:

− "Pluralism (members of both minority cultures and majority cultures are influential in setting key values and policies),
− Structural integration (minority-culture members are well represented in jobs at all levels and in all functional responsibilities),
− Informal network integration (various forms of mentoring and support groups assist in the career development of minority-culture members),
− Absence of prejudice and discrimination (a variety of raining and task-force activities address the need to eliminate culture-group biases),
− Minimum intergroup conflict (diversity does not lead to destructive conflicts between members of majority and minority cultures)". [Schermerhorn, 2011, p. 266]

All researchers observe that there are visible and invisible differences between members of a community or a group, which might be the basis for diversity. Personality (traits, skills, and abilities), internal characteristics (gender, race, ethnicity, intelligence, sexual orientation), external characteristics (culture, nationality, religion, marital or parental status) and organizational characteristics (position, department, union/nonunion) could constitute the four broad categories here. [Begec, 2013] Researchers suggest that the differences can and should be exploited by creating an appropriate work environment where everybody feels appreciated and can realize their full potential keeping in mind the company's best interest and their own responsibilities. However, this may not be easy, as people resist change and feel hesitant about what is different. [Begec, 2013] In effect, sound judgement call of whether instill diversity in organization shall result from extensive analysis of potential opportunities and threats which are to be set against organizational culture.

Negative effects of diversity in organizations can include lack of cohesiveness, inefficiency, anxiety, misunderstandings, mistrust. However, companies undertake diversity management hoping for unquestionable benefits in the form of stronger creativity and innovativeness, better utilization of talent, increased marketplace understanding, enhanced leadership effectiveness, better decisions, increased quality of team problem-solving, building effective global relationships and keeping up with competitors. [Łukasiewicz, 2014; Mazur, 2012] Looking at more "human" aspects, they can experience such positive effects as becoming an employer of choice, attracting and retaining talents, developing high-potentials, increased morale and work satisfaction, lower employee-rotation, less absenteeism, lower general stress level and conflictogenicity. [Linehan, Hanappi-Egger, 2006; Ready, Hill, Conger, 2009] According to R. Roosevelt Thomas, organizational cultures that respect diversity can gain performance advantages from the mixture of talents and perspectives they can draw upon. [Schermenrhorn, 2011] Attention to diversity is also a symptom of certain ethical standards. [Schneider, Barsoux, 2013]

The existence of diversity is not enough for organization to cherish those benefits. [Shen, Tang, D'Netto, 2014] Positive impacts might be guaranteed only when diversity is leveraged through training and supportive human resource practices. [Kubica, 2014;

Laudicina, 1993; Syper-Jędrzejak, 2014] To get these benefits companies must include diversity in recruitment, hiring, training, promotion and development practices for all employees. diversity-related initiatives should be also included in the definition of a company's long-term goals and mission. This is because cultural issues cut across a number of processes carried out by companies. If we assume that gaining value rom diversity requires a sustained, systemic approach and long-term commitment, then it makes sense to create organizational culture and structure that supports flow of people and ideas across organizational or divisional boundaries. Diversity policy should be reflected in the organizational culture to prevent its rejection company-wide and to stimulate its positive reception and spread. The success depends on the engagement of both top management and frontline workers.

In the context of organizations, subcultures seem to be good illustrations of diversity. Organizational subcultures can be understood as "groups of people who share similar beliefs and values based on their work responsibilities and personal characteristics". [Schermerhorn, 2011, p.267] Those informal groupings include people with shared demographic and job identities. In other words, organizational subcultures "subscribe to clusters of understandings, behavior and cultural forms that characterize them as distinctive groups within an organization". [Trice, 1993, p. 141]

The existence of subcultures may create diversity challenges and pose a risk of discrimination. Naturally people think of such criteria for building organizational subcultures as for diversity identification, such as gender, age, race. [Moore, 2015; Richard, Barnett, Dwyer, Chadwick, 2004; Rakowska, 2014; Sanchez, Brock, 1996] The many possible organizational subcultures include also occupational subcultures that form among persons who share the same professions and skills – such as managers and designers. [Schermerhorn, 2011, p. 267] Occupational subcultures "socialize persons into specific ways of performing a series of tasks, as well as into the values, attitudes, interests, skills and knowledge that accompany and justify them". [Trice, 1993, p. 145] Professionals often inhibit a need to work independently which may bring conflicts in the cross-functional projects. Need for empowerment may stand in contradiction to the top-down management style and organizational desire to exert control mechanisms. As occupations produce ethnocentricity in their members, the fruitful collaboration between representatives of various profession might be challenging.

3. METHODOLOGY & RESULTS

It may not be easy to work well with persons whose backgrounds are very different from our own. The best understanding is most likely gained through direct contact and from being open-minded. That is why management and design students were asked about their reflections on their field of expertise and how it may influence their potential collaboration in the future. Coming from two schools being part of Ramon Llull University: ESADE Business School and ESDi School of Design, students had a chance to work together on joint projects in order to share their experiences. The idea to merge design and management perspectives stemmed from the belief that educational training for the two groups is completely different and from the realization that organizations appreciate design more and search for a proper location within their structures. Design thinking as one of the methodologies to solve

problems with creative ideas becomes more known in the Western countries and will gain more popularity in Poland, with the expansion of belief that experimentation and visual approach to analyzing and illustrating business concepts may be valuable. [Bayram, 2013; Calabretta, Montaña, Iglesias, 2008; Dunne, Martin, 2006; Gardien, Gilsing, 2013; Liedtka, Ogilvie, 2012]

In the study self-identification was the first important aspect, from the diversity management standpoint. (Table 1) Students were to describe the key features of professionals they represented. In case of designers, creativity (83,3%), empathy and ability to put oneself in other's shoes (55%) and ability to work in a team (51,7%) were named in the first place. Business students picked mainly leadership potential (59,6%), communication skills (56,1%) and organizing and planning skills (54,4%). The one feature that lapped the most was ability to work in a team. It focuses on collaboration capabilities and withdraws from the self-inflicting and sole-acting individual. The main finding here is that designers are creators focused to great extent on products and aesthetic values while managers have a more broad perspective with main focus on organizing and building relationships with others.

Table 1. Key features and skills of a designer/manager [%].

student	Creativity	Ability to work outside the box	Ability to work independently, on a cross-section of any organizational structures	Ability to work in a team	Organizing and planning skills	Technical mastery (drawing, etc.)
designer	83,3	33,3	3,3	51,7	25,0	20,0
manager	5,3	7,0	17,5	43,9	54,4	3,5

Communication skills	Analytical skills	Empathy and ability to put oneself in other's shoes	Financial mastery	Broad network of personal contacts	Leadership potential	Other
33,3	38,3	55,0	-	15,0	6,7	1,7
56,1	22,8	19,3	7,0	3,5	59,6	5,3

Source: Own research.

Acknowledging the touchpoints between designers and managers and the potential need to collaborate, it was worth verifying further the strengths of both professional groups in terms of building mutual relationships, dealing with problems and structuring work. (Table 2) When describing designers, design students most often stated that they can think in abstract way (78,9%), feel comfortable with experimenting and testing various options (78%), make decisions driven by experiential models (77,65), value subjective experience (75,9%), make decisions mainly based on emotional arguments (46,6%), look for novelties (46,4%), value diversity in terms of practices, experiences, skills (44,6%). To describe managers, business students used such phrases as they assume rationality and objectivity are key values (95%), rely on thorough analysis in order to arrive at one „best" answer (85%), make decisions

mainly based on numeric models (86,2%) and logic arguments (78,3%), prefer particular reasoning (72,9%), try to rule out uncertainty (70%), value planning and organizing as determinants of effectiveness (66,1%). Both groups shared opinions when they stated that subjective experience, comfort with experimentation, emotions, looking for novelties, abstract thinking determine the thinking and doing mode of designers more than managers. They also agreed when describing managers through such features as rationality and objectivity, thorough analysis, logic and numeric arguments, reasoning.

Table 2. Characteristics typical/common for designers and for managers [%].

student	-*	They value diversity in terms of practices, experiences, skills	They reject status quo in order to start big changes	They try to rule out uncertainty	They feel comfortable when they control the environment	They value subjective experience
designer	d	44,6	30,9	20,4	32,8	75,9
manager		3,4	50,8	3,3	3,3	55,9
designer	m	5,4	27,3	25,9	22,4	6,9
manager		25,9	3,4	70,0	60,0	1,7
designer	a	50,0	27,3	25,9	44,8	17,2
manager		63,8	32,2	13,3	26,7	30,5
designer	n	0,0	14,5	27,8	0,0	0,0
manager		6,9	13,6	13,3	10,0	11,9

*Legend: d-This is more of designer's thinking and doing mode; m-This is more of manager's thinking and doing mode; a-Designers and managers share this trait to the same extent; n -It is hard to say.
Source: Own research.

When analyzing the data, we can observe not only how different designers and managers are, in accordance to their perceptions and beliefs about their professional identity and what it takes to be a good professional in one's field. Complementarity of the qualities stands out. Rationality and objectivity that is attributed to business domain may be enriched with emotions and search for human insights that guide designers' performance. The focus on stability and control that is valued by many companies seems obsolete in modern business world where new technologies disrupt past experiences and pose completely new challenges. [Liedtka, Ogilvie, 2012, p. 9] Therefore the appreciation or tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty that characterizes designer thinking may restore business models and complement planning with experimentation. Designers´ skills of observation and iteration may also prove valuable in terms of deeper understanding of the needs of the consumers, which may contribute to generating innovations (once new opportunities are discovered) and prevent from online crises (as customers share their negative experiences with brands and products freely with large audience in online venues and not a single company can control this flow of

information). The empathy that designers possess is crucial when dealing with users and customers (when trying to learn about their experiences and needs) and with peers (during collaboration on the solutions).

Research show that how two professions view themselves and one another may create some tensions, become fundamentals for misunderstanding and/or hinder cooperation. The occupational subcultures of designers and managers seem to be strong which may make any changes difficult to implement and sustain. That is why organizations that want to build on the full creative potential of their work force, need to find proper ways how to handle the differences, especially that these are complementary qualities, as shown above.

4. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

As some researchers observe, the state of being part of multiple subcultures becomes a norm nowadays. [Geertz, 1983] Even if members of occupations form distinctive subcultures, they do interact with and must adapt to members of a variety of other subcultures which may create some tensions. The existence of subcultures may create diversity challenges. As was argued previously, organizations import well-developed occupations into their workplace seeking tangible benefits. They alter their structures especially when "the cost and uncertainty of engaging in an exchange relation with groups outside the organization's boundaries outstrip the cost of providing the desired resource internally". [Van Maanen, Barley, 1985, p. 41] The is evidence that diversity nurtures creativity and innovation. [Gajek, 2014]

The reasoning goes, that professional paths of management and design specialists intersect in more aspects than just product design and yet both groups of professionals develop different sets of skills and competencies which makes them follow certain behavioral patterns and feel more comfortable in different settings. They also share assumptions about each other which influences the quality of their collaboration. In effect, it becomes vital that both groups of professionals understand the thinking and doing mode of each other in order to achieve business goals in a more innovative and effective way. As design management calls for common understanding, the existing differences should be viewed as complementary competencies and strengths. In other words, organizations need to manage this kind of diversity which is grounded in professional subcultures.

Biography

Katarzyna Bachnik, PhD, is an expert with 10-year experience in management, innovation and design thinking, international marketing, corporate social responsibility and social media. She has worked as a lecturer, a trainer and an editor and she is an author of several publications and expertise papers in the aforementioned areas. Affiliated at Institute of Management, Warsaw School of Economics, she has been granted several international scientific scholarships.

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