

2024

INSTITUTE OF
DESIGN REPORT

Taking *Responsibility* in the Age of AI

Design Leads Organizations
through Five Urgent Challenges



2024 Institute of Design Report

Taking *Responsibility* in the Age of AI

Design Leads Organizations
through Five Urgent Challenges

Foreword Anijo Mathew Dean, Institute of Design

Research Mark Jones Associate Professor of User Research and Service Design,
Institute of Design

With participation from designers at Accenture, Capital One,
Deloitte, IBM, IDEO, Microsoft, JP Morgan Chase & Co.,
Meta, Nordstrom, Steelcase, WhatsApp, and more.

Contents & Executive Summary

In 2023, researchers from the Institute of Design at Illinois Tech (ID) spoke with design leaders and business executives from a range of high-profile organizations about the most daunting imperatives they face today, and in the process learned why—and how—design can have the transformational impact required to thrive in the age of AI. For each of these pressing needs, this report lays out smart moves for design, specific ways to apply design strengths and skills to ensure success.

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Associate Professor of
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Foreword by Anijo Mathew



WORD

“Technology seems to be outpacing our ability to *harness* it effectively, and organizations continue to question the value of design.

At the Institute of Design—where we’ve pioneered systems design and human-centered design, where we authored *101 Design Methods* (and counting), and where, every day, we are devising new frameworks and approaches—we are committed to the use of design to continually improve our lived environment. So, we consider it our responsibility to take stock of the role of design in our world and our organizations.

Such a review seems most appropriate today, when technology seems to be outpacing our ability to harness it effectively, and organizations continue to question the value of design.

We, as designers and design-trained leaders, need to link specific attributes of our skill sets with the specific pressing needs of our time. In the following pages, ID faculty member Mark Jones uncovers how design professionals are uniquely qualified to take responsibility and lead today’s most important organizations to success.

The research findings here build on and reference our 2020 report, “Lead with Purpose,” which made actionable recommendations for leveraging design throughout an organization for competitive advantage. As our graduate school continues to be a distinct epicenter for training the kind of strategic and creative leaders our world needs, we will continue to examine the state of design practice and provide recommendations for our graduates, our allies, design leaders, and their communities worldwide.

Both the vitality of the design practice and its promise to realize desired outcomes for organizations and societies require our collective optimism and action. Let’s consider where we are—and where we must go next.

Anijo Mathew
Dean, Institute of Design

INTROD

Introduction by Mark Jones

This report draws on research conducted in 2023 by the Institute of Design. We sought to understand the state of design today in large, design-mature organizations. We interviewed 29 design leaders about the state of design in their organizations and the challenges that designers are best suited to address. Design leaders at such organizations as Meta, JP Morgan Chase, Ford, and IDEO responded.

We asked what's going well, what difficulties they face, and where they see the most opportunity for design in the future. Similar to our "Lead with Purpose" research from 2020, we heard that even design-mature organizations struggle to leverage design in shaping their strategies.

Since we conducted our interviews in 2023, the mood about the state of design has deteriorated. The corporate love affair with design is over, some claim. Design thinking doesn't work and design strategy has failed to bring innovation to market, they argue. Meanwhile, large-scale layoffs have hit design practitioners across industries, particularly in tech, affecting some seasoned and brilliant design executives—including some of the folks we talked to for this research.

So is this all evidence that efficiency and conventional business processes have won?

Has design failed, even at our most forward-thinking organizations?

After dozens of conversations with design leaders at large, design-mature organizations, I can tell you that the answer is no. Despite the death knell sounded in some corners, design is more urgently needed than ever.

In fact, the design leaders that we spoke with saw the need for sophisticated design practice increasing in the future. These organizations and their leaders believe strongly in using design to solve tough challenges. And we have entered an age in which the challenges for organizations will be gnarlier, riskier, and harder to get right. The past few years have seen nearly all organizations become adept at managing the transition to a digital world. In many ways, we have come to a relatively steady state, where organizations have the technology in place to meet customer expectations.

But that steady state won't last. With the evolution of AI happening now, the world is changing exponentially faster, and the risks are higher than ever. If new product launches, new services, and new systems are based purely on notions of efficiency, we will see biases, inequities, and unintended consequences mount like never before.

The design leaders we talked to emphasized that in this age of AI, we need strategic designers who can navigate complex, interconnected landscapes to ensure thoughtful and appropriate evolutions in our offerings.

UCTION

So, in this report, we consider how we can take responsibility and advance design within organizations at a critical moment—when it has so much to offer humans (our customers) and the world (our systems).

We've distilled from our research five urgent challenges today's organizations face and outlined recommendations for how design professionals can make organizational success possible in this fast-changing environment. In short: design leaders need to address these five urgent organizational challenges in their processes.

At ID, we are all about evolving design process. We work to instill the mentality—in our students, learners, and partners—that we are *always in process*. Because this mentality, in our view, is required to iterate and continually build the futures we want.

If you have a need for speed—as we found many organizations do!—see our executive summary on pages 2–3, which outlines our major takeaways and how you can take this thinking into your everyday doing.

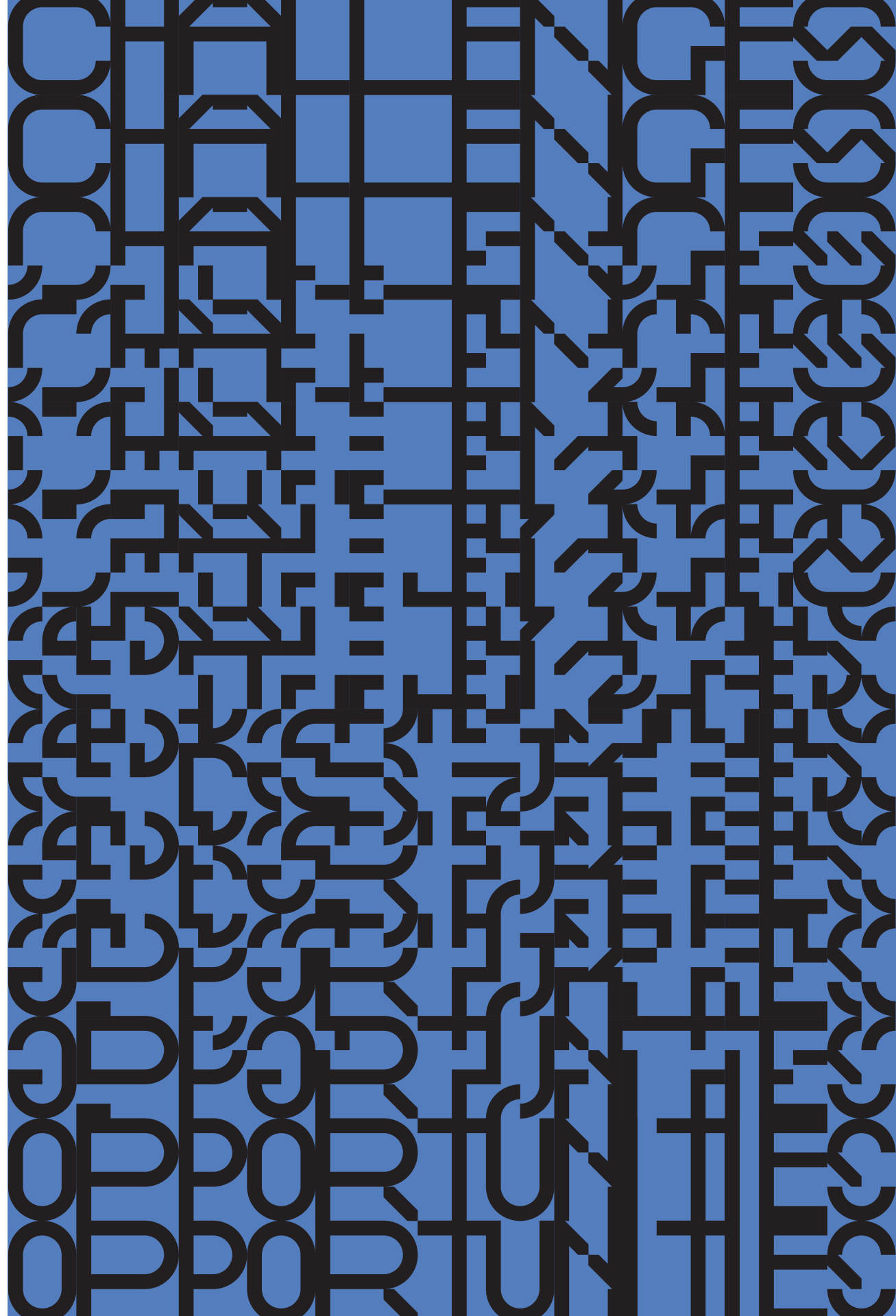


A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

Mark Jones
Associate Professor of User Research and
Service Design, Institute of Design

Design and designers are uniquely equipped to convert today's most urgent organizational *challenges* into organizational *opportunities*.

Design can help today's leaders leverage AI and satisfy other unprecedented consumer expectations of technologies and brands.



Based on the observations and recommendations of the business executives and design professionals who participated in our study, this report asks—and answers—the *following questions*:

What are the most urgent *challenges* organizations face today?

How can design and designers convert these challenges into *opportunities*?
How does design take responsibility?

For each challenge, what *insights* from our study participants—business leaders and design professionals—help clarify the road ahead?


We all want to generate value for a set of stakeholders.

We want to be responsible not for reckless growth, but *responsible value*. So it becomes a question of—how are we contributing to that?

Kevin Bethune

FOUNDER AND CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER,
DREAMS · DESIGN + LIFE

What are the most *urgent* challenges organizations face today?



5 urgent organizational challenges emerged from our research:

- 1 Organizations need to work at speed.**

Successful organizations will create and deliver new experiences—born out of staggering technology—with contingencies for unpredictable outcomes.
- 2 Organizations need systems thinkers.**

In our high-tech world, everything operates from a system—and digital offerings are notably systems-based. Organizations must have systems thinkers who can frame and break down the complexity in ways all team members can understand.
- 3 Organizations need facilitators.**

People who can translate information and insights across disciplines are at a premium.
- 4 Organizations need new metrics.**

Teams that can measure if and how their offerings are meeting consumers' changing expectations are in high demand.
- 5 Organizations need to demonstrate their values.**

Today's consumers prioritize brands that demonstrate social responsibility through sustainability and representation.

Each of these five urgent organizational challenges calls out for the attributes designers bring to every *strategic endeavor*.

People & Partnerships

Bring in the right people with the right skills and elevate others to their full potential. Find and make allies in the organization.

Designers and design leaders are agile, creative people who use partnerships (systems thinking skills and collaborations) and good design practice (effective working methods) to realize executive vision and facilitate an efficient process through the functions of the organization.

Practice

Understand how design works at the organization's strategy level and identify how "good practice" works in that context.

As design professionals, we advance collaborative problem-solving and *reenvision* challenges as opportunities.



Versed in soliciting the insights of others and integrating varied needs and preferences into our work, we understand that all stakeholders should be heard and valued. Inclusivity allows for the exploration of various ideas, insights, and potential solutions.

Creative thinkers actively question established norms and seek new configurations that lead to breakthrough innovations. With skills in facilitation, strategy, and translation, we tap into the collective intelligence and creativity of the team and steer it toward meaningful outcomes.

Urgent Organizational Challenge



1 Organizations need to *work at speed.*

Creating and delivering new experiences—born out of staggering technology—with contingencies for unpredictable outcomes is the name of the game today.



The Working-at-Speed Opportunity

Designers put forth “what might be” and make the intangible tangible. We collaborate with different players in real time and drive generative prototyping so everyone on the team can see actual representations of the ideas in play.

Designers know people need things to react to, and the sooner team members share their reactions, the more quickly they can inform, improve, and *finish* the project.

Take Responsibility:

Achieve Speed



On our design team, we have been looking for strong designers who can prototype. The prototyping skills, especially right now, are most important as we start to envision these future-looking technologies and experiences. I think that's most critical.

Liz Danzico

Design Leader, Microsoft

Prototype everything. Organizations benefit from a culture of iterative problem-solving. Designers build prototypes that generate responses, reflect the team's insights, and lead to key improvements.

Embrace the qualitative strengths of design. Design encompasses the ability to create something special, address user needs in innovative ways, and evoke emotional responses. While creating new-to-the-world experiences, it is essential to consider their broader impact. By emphasizing the qualitative nature of design, organizations can fully appreciate its transformative value and unlock its true potential for positive change.

Promote design's ability to identify ethical issues and biases before it's too late. Bringing design into the process at the right time is crucial, especially when dealing with the complexities of emerging technologies and human behavior. Brand-new technology might be critical to a project, but it's experimental by nature and often carries unintended consequences. When involved from the start, designers help prevent ethical issues or biases from compromising the business solution—because we design to solve them and help ensure user adoption.



Urgent Organizational Challenge



2 Organizations need *systems* *thinkers*.

In our high-tech world everything operates from a system, and digital offerings are notably systems-based. Organizations must have systems thinkers who can frame and break down the layers, dependencies, obstructions, and possibilities of the systems that underpin our daily lives—in ways everyone in the organization can understand. ↘

The Systems-Thinking Opportunity

Designers create holistic solutions instead of fragmented ones, because we are sense-makers. We take ambiguous concepts and ideas and make them concrete. With the skills to create clear visual representations—systems maps, stakeholder maps, ecology maps—of the systems everyone in the organization needs to understand, designers position all stakeholders to grasp complexities, and we do so in ways that are helpful yet not reductionist.

Designers are comfortable with complexity. We can work with partners from other disciplines in the organization to investigate all the factors relevant to a project and their possible interactions and outcomes, then we make those systems clear to all stakeholders as the basis for a promising strategy and execution.

Take Responsibility:
Think in Systems



I think one of the biggest misconceptions is this belief that design is about the surface details, and not understanding that design is about the whole thing. It's about framing the problem you're solving in a way that sets the right intention.

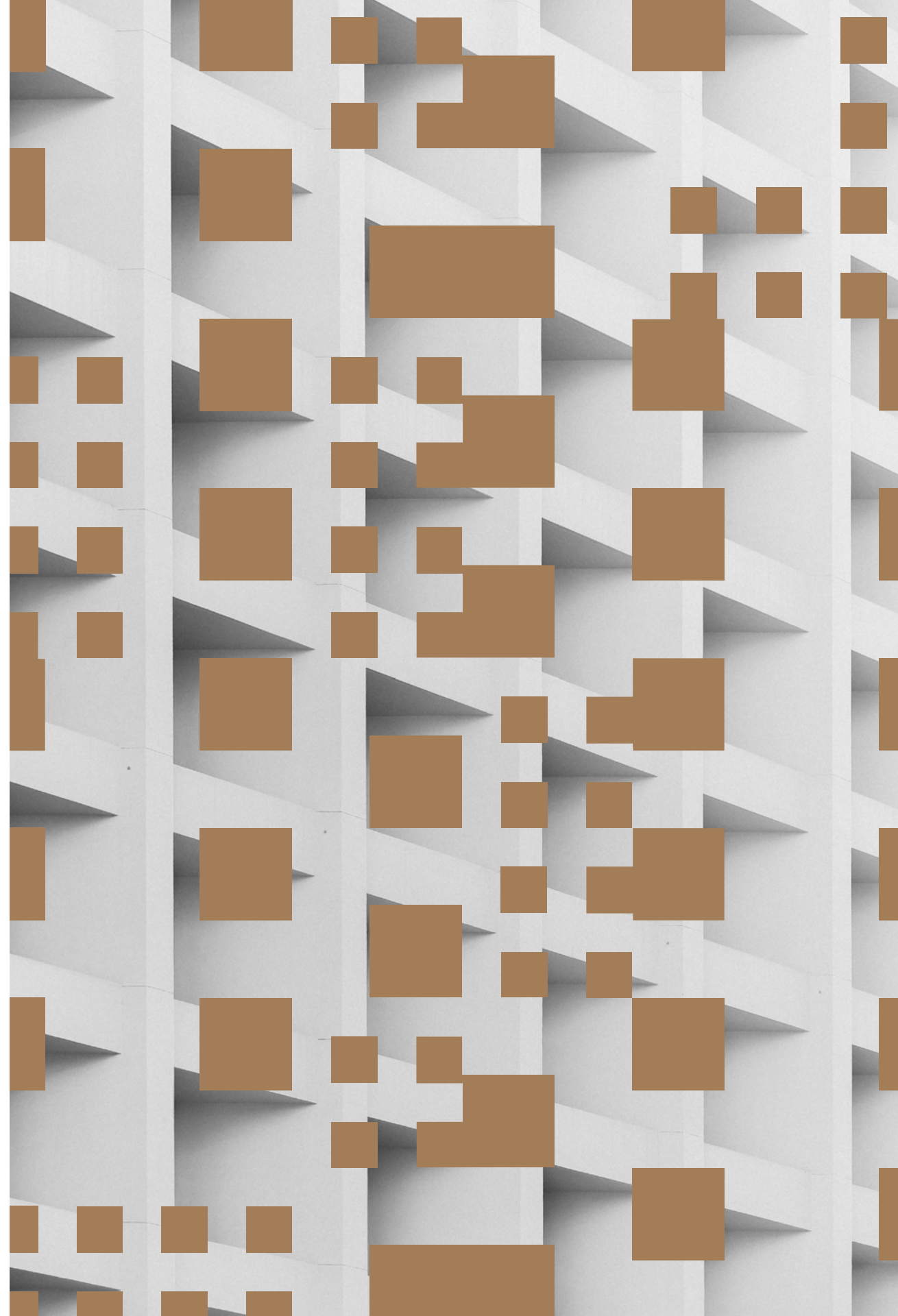
Katrina Alcorn General Manager, Design, IBM

Anticipate stakeholder interests. Organizations need to anticipate and consider the value criteria important to each stakeholder when engaging in projects that cut across teams and areas of expertise. Fostering regard for design among all stakeholders helps align objectives, supports collaboration, and ensures that design outcomes address the needs and expectations of all participants.

Pay attention to timing and advocacy. The more complex a system, the greater the need for design expertise. Good designers and design leaders can identify the optimal moment to frame a problem—and move the team forward. This intelligibility doesn't come at a predetermined moment in a delineated process; rather, design best practices determine the right timing. Notably, when you introduce design

concepts and possibilities early on, basing them on a clear framing of the problem, they can deliver the most impact—particularly on strategy.

Promote humanity-centered design. Addressing large-scale complex issues and contributing to positive social change requires addressing issues at a larger scale than the individual or the persona. Societal implications of a product or service matter more than ever. And today, taking the long view and embedding good, socially responsible design practice into a product or service also earns brand loyalty.



Urgent Organizational Challenge



3 Organizations need *facilitators*.

They face an ongoing need for people who can take a holistic, big-picture view and translate complex information and insights across disciplines and departments—without losing key details.



The Facilitation Opportunity

Today's seamless and sophisticated consumer products, services, and experiences require large, diverse project teams. While these varied experts want to partner to create the best possible solution, they struggle to understand each other.

Designers and design leaders are trained in collaboration and facilitation and know how to focus groups on significant questions that can lead to more desirable outcomes—not only for consumers, but also for their own colleagues.

In design, we must know how and why anything works the way it does. Thus, design leaders must develop the domain knowledge necessary to ensure clear understanding of all the moving parts of strategy and execution across the team, throughout the process.

Take Responsibility:

Translate, Facilitate, Collaborate

Forge alliances and collaborate effectively.

Advance from having a star cheerleader (or two) to building an enthusiastic fan base for design by becoming a reliable problem-solving partner. Integrating design into an organization often requires a change in the culture. Effective designers build trust by engaging not only top executives but also influential individuals across the organization, such as client relationship leads, project managers, and a range of other team members. Establishing strong partnerships becomes so embedded in the culture that even as people leave, new partners naturally emerge and bridges across erstwhile siloes remain strong.

Develop a shared language—and speak it.

Always use common terms easily understood by professionals. Nobody enjoys encounters with the esoteric when there's work to do, so successful designers learn the terms used across the organization and make their own terms as clear and as accessible as possible, drawing on the vocabulary of others.

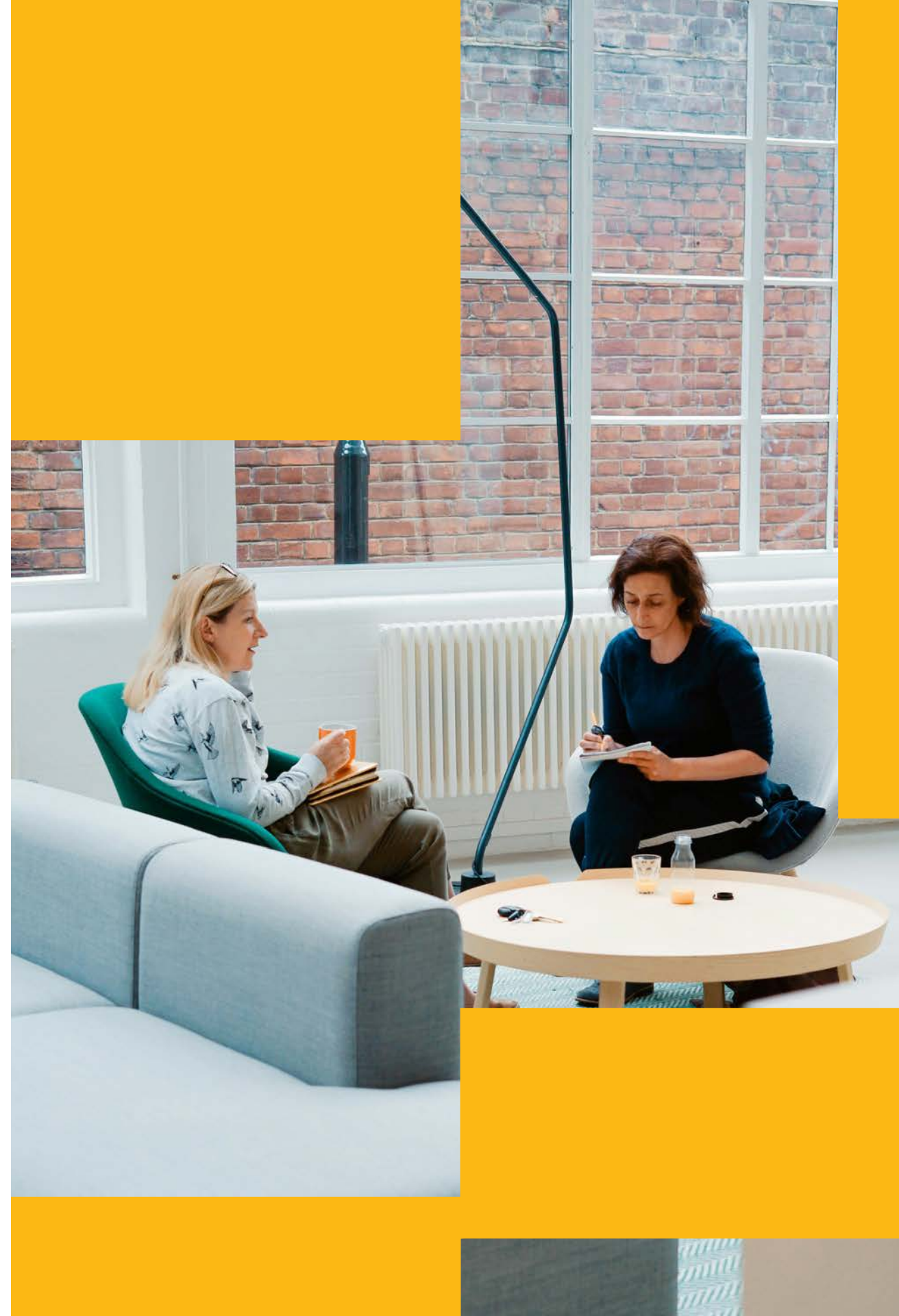
Strive for collective accountability and collaboration from all members of the organization.


Design has the greatest impact when designers, business professionals, and technologists all work together, from the earliest stages of a project. The integration of design within different departments and disciplines creates an environment where its value is more readily recognized, understood, and leveraged.

Convey value through tangible evidence.


Success stories and concrete outcomes resulting from effective design implementation can serve as proof points. Showcasing how design has transformed projects and achieved favorable results provides the most compelling case for its value.

When it comes to making their work clearly relevant to the people who depend on it, no one is better equipped than a designer. Everything designers do stems from responsibility for making something useful that can be understood. Therefore, designers should be at the very center of every effort to describe and clarify the reasons for a particular process within an organization—from the why (initial strategy) to the what (product or service launch) to the how (use and usefulness).





The skill set that
I want to see my
team improve on
most is facilitation.



Because that means you can communicate
your information. You can communicate your solutions.
You can bring people together around it. That is the
superpower that we're leaving on the table.

Joseph O' Sullivan

HEAD OF UX RESEARCH,
JP MORGAN CHASE & CO.

Urgent Organizational Challenge



4 Organizations need *new metrics*.

They need to anticipate and measure new, highly consequential impacts so they can understand if and how their offerings are meeting consumers' changing expectations.

The New Metrics Opportunity

Today sustainability and ethical brand behaviors matter deeply to consumers. A brand needs to demonstrate integrity, reflect awareness of social issues, and prevent unintended social consequences that could damage its reputation.

Conventional business metrics fall short of assessing performance in extended areas of concern. Just as our original design triad has extended from desirable, feasible, and viable to inclusive, just, and sustainable, organizations need to go beyond measuring satisfaction and retention and find ways to anticipate and measure new impacts related to:

1. Inclusion
2. Justice
3. Sustainability
4. Organizational change

Human-centered designers are already well versed in qualitative measurements of performance. Does this design fundamentally work for the people using it? What are their measurements for success, and how can business assess performance based on their quirkier preferences? What about ethical corporate behaviors and societal commitments, such as sustainability and service to the global community?

Designers have long been accountable for defining experience metrics for success. Our skill in qualitative metrics has never been more valuable to organizations seeking to secure brand loyalty among consumers who have a bevy of options. Today, these consumers demand integrity and make their selections accordingly. By defining and differentiating terms such as "business metrics" and "outcome metrics," designers can help their organizations understand what they stand for, and how they can stand out.

Take Responsibility:

Balance *Quantitative* and *Qualitative* Measures

Be data-informed, building trust through evidence. Designers don't let metrics drive every aspect of the work, because we know that success in design cannot be solely measured by the number of users or engagement metrics. Design encompasses intangible factors such as user experience, emotional connection, and long-term brand loyalty, which are harder to extrapolate and measure accurately.

Metrics and evidence matter as much as they ever have, but today organizations need to expand the scope of their metrics to reflect growing consumer demands. Designers pay attention to both quantitative results and qualitative features, and we can explain how evidence-based decisions contribute to meeting business metrics.

Keep qualitative impacts in mind, with an eye toward human and financial outcomes. While some metrics can be straightforward numerical representations, such as active daily users, others may capture fuzzier, more complex aspects such as organizational change or cultural shifts. These types of metrics aim to challenge the organization to think differently about itself, often requiring the tracking of less regularly measured statistics.

Shift away from the notion of a singular metric and toward a context-specific evaluation of desired outcomes. Overall, the process of measuring design impact necessitates a nuanced approach that balances the transformative potential of design with the need for tangible metrics. By drawing on design expertise in recognizing both the complexities





You are fundamentally saying, the way we've done business in the past is not the way we're going to do business in the future, right? I'm going to fundamentally try and change the way we build, the way we *create value*, which is terrifying when you're a publicly traded company, because the pressure to hit quarterly earnings reports is immense...

Iain Roberts

Partner and Chief Operating Officer, IDEO

involved and the broader implications of design interventions, organizations can adopt meaningful measurement and evaluation practices. These practices will capture both the quantitative and qualitative impact of design on various aspects of an organization's success.

Consider user needs versus business outcomes. Measuring the impact of design requires a delicate balance between aligning with business objectives and serving the genuine needs of users. Designers recognize that success cannot be solely determined by metrics; various factors must be considered. Designers are trained in delivering high-quality products that address longstanding user needs, and we have experience evaluating the overall user experience beyond superficial metrics.

Today organizations must broaden value criteria beyond financial considerations and measure how well they are capturing the hearts and minds of stakeholders and addressing factors such as sustainability, ethics, and employee well-being. By satisfying multiple value criteria, businesses achieve stronger customer relationships, brand loyalty, and long-term success.

Urgent Organizational Challenge



5 Organizations need to demonstrate their *values*.

Today's consumers prioritize brands that demonstrate social responsibility through sustainability and representation.



The Opportunity to Demonstrate Values

While business knows that brands need to convey social responsibility across our varied global community, many organizations still lack the diversity within needed to inform that effort.

As designers, we are trained to design for people other than ourselves, to put ourselves in others' shoes. People adept in humanity-centered design look through an ethical lens when proposing solutions. Still, to strengthen this aspect of their work, organizations must also work to build more diverse project teams internally.

Take Responsibility:
Lead with Purpose



I think mentorship is key. Right now, I mentor about three people on my team to try to get them to the next level.

Gladys Rosa

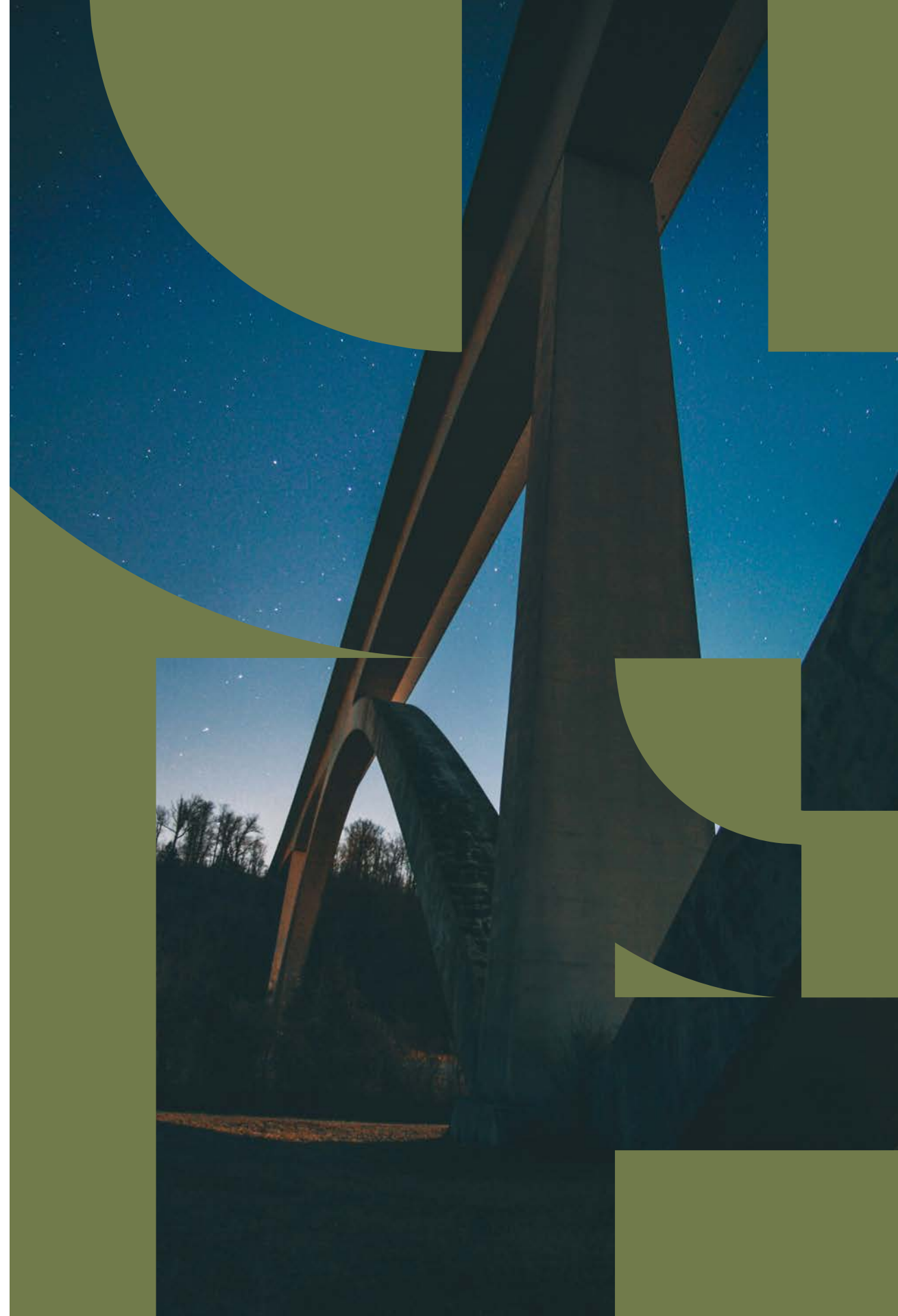
Experience Research and Strategy Leader, Meta

Insist on diversity. Forming diverse teams in terms of expertise, race, and gender is a baseline requirement. For an organization to keep pace with changes in the population, every project team must have diverse perspectives. Notably, π -shaped designers, grounded in design skills, are ever-curious about user needs, desires, and routines, and they are also beholden to tech and business requirements. An expansive thinker, adept in the art of granting consumer wishes, the π -shaped designer is uniquely positioned to help the organization anticipate and meet varied consumer preferences.

Maximize the potential of designers within your organization. Training, mentorship, and elevating designers to their fullest potential all require care and attention. One key issue right now is the limited

scope for career progression within the design field, where the lack of codification and defined roles creates uncertainty and imposter syndrome among professionals. Furthermore, there is often a disparity in skill sets between design production/craft and design strategy/research, which necessitates the hiring of craft-oriented individuals and providing them with training in strategic aspects.

Implement supportive training programs tailored to different career levels. These programs can include one-on-one mentorship, group collaborations, and skill-specific workshops. By offering a diverse range of support mechanisms, organizations empower designers to enhance their skills and knowledge continuously.





We have
an innovation
development
program where we
take graduates *fresh
from school.*

As we were making a list of the schools to hit, we went to colleges with a black minority representation intentionally.

Janaki Kumar

MANAGING DIRECTOR AND CHIEF DESIGN
OFFICER, COMMERCIAL BANKING,
JP MORGAN CHASE & CO.

Takeaways

PEOPLE & PARTNERSHIPS

Bring in the right people with the right skills and elevate others to their full potential. Find and make allies in the organization.

People & Partnerships

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Translate, Facilitate, Collaborate

- Forge alliances and collaborate effectively.
- Strive for collective accountability and collaboration from all members of the organization.
- Convey value through tangible evidence.
- Develop a shared language—and speak it.

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Lead with Purpose

- Insist on diversity.
- Maximize the potential of designers within your organization.
- Implement supportive training programs tailored to different career levels.

PRACTICE

Understand how design works at the organization's strategy level and identify how "good practice" works in that context.

Practice

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Think in Systems

- Anticipate stakeholder interests.
- Pay attention to timing and advocacy.
- Promote humanity-centered design.

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Achieve Speed

- Prototype everything.
- Embrace the qualitative strengths of design.
- Promote design's ability to identify ethical issues and biases before it's too late.

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Balance Quantitative and Qualitative Measures

- Be data-informed, building trust through evidence.
- Keep qualitative impacts in mind, with an eye toward human and financial outcomes.
- Shift away from the notion of a singular metric and toward a context-specific evaluation of desired outcomes.

Research Team, Methods, and Participants

Research by Mark Jones, Sanya Shah, Janhavi Singh

Students from the Institute of Design at Illinois Tech—Sanya Shah (MDes + MBA 2024) and Janhavi Singh (MDes 2024)—worked with ID faculty advisor Mark Jones in 2023 to conduct research and produce this report on the current state of design in business.

The research findings summarized here are based on qualitative interviews with the 29 design and business professionals listed at right, along with their titles and organizations at the time of their interviews. We thank them for sharing their time and expertise.

Our Interview Participants

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Lawrence Abrahamson | Director, D-Ford Design Thinking and Culture, Ford |
| Katrina Alcorn | General Manager, Design, IBM |
| Zena Barakat | Executive Design Director, IDEO |
| Kevin Bethune | Founder and Chief Creative Officer, Dreams · Design + Life |
| John Cain | Principal, Sideriver Ventures, LLC & Adjunct Faculty, ID |
| Liz Danzico | Design Leader, Microsoft |
| Nick De La Mare | Managing Director, Accenture Song, Accenture |
| Megan Fath | Chief Design Officer, Deloitte |
| Jenna Fizel | Director, Software Design, IDEO |
| Donna Flynn | Vice President, Global Talent, Steelcase |
| Maria Giudice | Founder, Hot Studio; Executive Leadership coach; Author, <i>Changemakers: How Leaders Can Change Design</i> ; and Coauthor, <i>Rise of the DEP: Leadership by Design</i> |
| Kai Haley | Design Leader, VP of Design, Alto Pharmacy |
| Bill Hill | Senior Director, Enterprise, xd – Risk Design, Capital One |
| Moneta Ho Kushner | Director, Head of Consumer Design, WhatsApp |
| Grace Hwang | Mixed Reality Design & UX Research, Microsoft |
| Chris Kasabach | Executive Director, Watson |
| Shel Kimen | Managing Co-Director, Design Thinking & Culture, Ford |
| Janaki Kumar | Managing Director Chief Design Officer, Commercial Banking, JP Morgan Chase & Co. |
| Eva Meijia | Executive Director, IDEO |
| Jenny Nieman | President & CEO, Forward Space; Member of the Board, ID |
| Joseph O’Sullivan | Head of UX Research, JP Morgan Chase & Co. |
| John Payne | Head of Design at Public Policy Lab and Associate Professor, ID |
| Iain Roberts | Partner and Chief Operating Officer, IDEO |
| Gladys Rosa | Experience Research and Strategy Leader, Meta |
| Shani Sandy | Design Executive, IBM |
| William Seabrook | Design Leader, IBM |
| Elizabeth Spenko | Thought Leader, Mathison |
| Corwin Stone | Vice President, Experience Design Strategy and Ops, Capital One |
| John Yesko | Vice President, Experience Design, Nordstrom |

What's Next: The 2026 Institute of Design Report



Taking Responsibility in the Age of AI and our 2020 report, *Lead with Purpose*, were the product of a vast system of partners interrogating the field of design to understand its current status and unearth opportunities for where design might lead next. At the Institute of Design, we are always interrogating the state of design in the world, and in a range of organizations.

Are you interested in understanding where design is heading next? Let's think together. Contact me via email at zapf@id.iit.edu to discuss possibilities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Peter Zapf". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Peter Zapf (MDM 2011)
Director of Partnerships and Strategic Initiatives,
Institute of Design

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