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***I founded Designence©, a consultancy that specialises in education and research in design management and design leadership. Our holistic model, validated by 30 years of research with organisations, helps you to effectively lead and evaluate any transformation through design. I am particularly interested in healthcare, silver economy, urban design, social design, and systemic design.***

# **Designers, my Life Heroes: From Designomics to Designence© and Design**

*Dr Brigitte Borja de Mozota*

## **Abstract**

**Design science is purpose, process, form aiming at a “better world” for humanity. Both a philosophy of persons and of forms connecting designers’ theories with other sciences. The paper explains WHY and HOW my life purpose is to research evidence of the roles and value of design in economics.**

**For all designers my Life Heroes... Demonstrating effects of valuing design capabilities into strategy, innovation, brand, and performance. From PhD in 1985 to European research with 33 design driven CEOs in 2002, my posture as academics developed two models:**

**Designomics is the system of design value creation as relational economics Life Centric industry and Designence© a model for design leaders for managing, visualising, and measuring design strategic impact in value chain, business model and society.**

**Forever, advocate of a transformation of organisations’ theory to recognise design as an autonomous function in all organisations.**

***Keywords: Design Science, Design Thinking, Design Strategy, Designomics, Designence, Life Heroes***

## **Early years: from Prisunic Ethics to Design Management**

**In the 1960s, I graduated in econometrics, mathematics, economics, and English. I had no clear career path but was lucky to start as a researcher in the statistics department at SAPAC Printemps Prisunic. This role introduced me to the vibrant world of innovative architecture and decorative arts that department stores championed. By the 1970s, Prisunic was THE place to be in France.**

**Jacques Gueden, CEO of Prisunic since 1946, inspired by Raymond Loewy in the USA - believed in "Prisunic ethics"—a visionary strategy to restore growth by reconciling human needs with progress through Quality, Style, and Price. Success followed with innovations in branding and the establishment of a design department of 40 individuals under artistic director Denise Fayolle obsessed to benefit from the best of creativity. She attracted exceptional talents like Andree Putman, Jean Widmer, and Peter Knapp, ensuring every detail - from labels to products and spaces - upheld the whole of Prisunic's identity.**

**My journey with designers began in 1969 when I joined the statistics department during the creation of the PRISU furniture catalog (1968-1976). This square-shaped catalog featured avant-garde furniture designs from Marc Held, Gae Aulenti, Marc Berthier, Olivier Mourgue, Danielle Quarante, Terence Conran... all now stars of vintage design boutiques. Think of me wearing 'Mary Quant' mini skirt walking on the Champs-Élysées in charge of observing reaction of customers on their innovative plastic furniture in our store ...**

**Prisunic symbolised the democratisation of 'good design', a principle that resonated deeply with me. My time there, shaped my view of designers as my 'raison d'être'— my Life Heroes. Their**

commitment to quality and creativity profoundly influenced my career.

## **Designers my 'raison d'être' forever my Life Heroes**

I was soon appointed as a buyer Au Printemps leading the decoration department, managing Paris Haussmann team, and curating collections for all stores. The dream job ... Guided by Prisunic ethics, I was quick to experiment similar strategy with the expertise of stylist Natacha Ferdman.

In the existing internal Bureau de Style, her job was to design trend books for us buyers. Good at mathematics I rapidly improved the finances of this costly department and I imagined a new way to manage through a continuous dialog with our stylist: asking questions, calling for her skills upstream when suppliers were showing new products. Facing Galeries Lafayette's competition nearby on Haussmann Boulevard, we innovated with exclusive collections driving growth in sales.

I deeply understood the value of working near a designer who taught me to SEE the world differently and about quality craft in artefacts. To think creatively - the whole system with all design disciplines. So, my department that first looked to me as a succession of unconnected parts, suddenly became a story for our clients and I shared this co-creative process with my sales team and managing turned out to be fun.

This exceptional "Au Printemps" design context changed my view of economics from transactional to relational economics. It made me feel the strategic value of design as a competitive advantage

through its impact on customer-centric culture. This changed me forever as a manager, as a person.

## **The entrepreneurial Leap**

In 1977, I ventured into entrepreneurship, founding America Designers. I discovered designers-entrepreneurs in the US like Massimo Vignelli, Mel Fante, Oak Hill, Taylor & Ng introducing their products in France as their agent through 'Moving' trade exhibition. Trusting the 'exception' of Printemps Prisunic in France as US mainstream business practice. The satisfaction of seeing their designs successful in France was immensely rewarding and further reinforced my belief in the transformative power of design—both as a creator of innovative artefacts but also as a societal force of change.

## **Was I thinking like a designer?**

Lately designers Ayse Birsel claimed that values are the foundations of our ideas: 'Whether we are designing a chair or our lives, the qualities we see in our Heroes are our own values.' I could not agree more! I believed in the continuing chain of design creating artefacts, design outputs, that in return through feedback loops transform society and changed business theories.

## **Academic pursuit: ENSCI Les Ateliers. PhD in Economics on Design**

Driven by curiosity, I transitioned to Academia facing my peers in economics totally ignorant and even suspicious on design. I wanted to research on WHY Design was invisible in economics and WHY designers develop a hate /love relationship with capitalism or business.

**I was fortunate again; Mitterrand became president of France; Jacques Lang opened a new school ENSCI les Ateliers (without age limit) which I joined in 1983 ... Here I explored the history of design and its foundation theories, design advocate of a 'better world' for people aligning them with business concepts in strategy, value, performance, innovation, brand, and reputation. I enjoyed the difference of design education, its orientation on problems finding and solving, on projects, 'hands on' learning, experimentation, craftsman skills, awareness of technology and materials and its creative mindset using art and drawing abilities. Simultaneously, I pursued at Université Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne a PhD in economics on design, focusing on the big picture of the intersection of design and economics, on the impact of all design disciplines in marketing and on searching any theoretical background.**

**Resonating with my early experience, a design management space emerged. I understood that integrating design within organisations enhanced knowledge capital and bridged functional silos R&D, marketing, HR. Forms as triadic —technology, use, beauty—creates a cohesive narrative that connects functions and better service customer experience. My PhD dissertation in June 1985 provided theoretical and empirical evidence of design's impact on business performance.**

### **Global recognition. Design Management advocate**

**A pivotal moment came when I partnered with the Design Management Institute (DMI) - created in 1997 in Boston - on the invitation of its President Earl Powell - another Life Hero for me - to share my PhD findings with leaders of design consultancies like Gianfranco Zaccai or design directors in large companies like Lee Green at IBM. I became an advocate for design's role in management research on strategy and innovation. One significant**

achievement was creating DMI's academic research activity helping bridge the gap between designers and business research worldwide. By researching on real-world applications of design management, we at DMI empowered organisations to harness design as a strategic asset. This collaboration deepened my understanding of design as both a discipline and a philosophy. I share with philosopher Luigi Pareyson "Design as a philosophy of the person that is also a philosophy of forms". *Esthétique : théorie de la formativité*, (2007, p196).

In organisations' theory, we care for people but not about theory of forms. Human consciousness is a dynamic spiral of human needs - physical, affective, social, intellectual, aesthetic, spiritual - that changes over time. This requires reinventing the forms in society to fulfil changing desires. Design makes visible through the culture of objects this universal law of humans changing their relationship to reality overtime. What I learnt from early days is useful for business research:

- The desire for beauty exists in all humans.
- Designers have a philosophy of life and a different set of skills.
- Design is contextual and holistic: the whole is in every action.

Following my research system after 2025 - 1985.

### **Designomics: The economics of designers**

Designomics encapsulates in any world context the economic ecosystem of designers integrating purpose, process, and form. (Fig2) Reducing design to just one element, as seen in the 'Design Thinking' movement's overemphasis on process skills undermines its holistic potential.

**Designomics is “the whole” for all designers and a ‘Design for All’ space. This framework positions design as a connector, enabling individuals to become ‘design-conscious’ actors. Designomics aggregates all design projects and disciplines. UX design is design, circular design is design, social design is design... A whole where fits each unique designer profile.**

**Figure 1, illustrates the diverse skills and roles designers play, from leader to maker, shaping the organisational culture and driving innovation. Design education develop capabilities to build a specific set of skills - some shared with other scientific mindsets - and enrich other sciences such as business.**

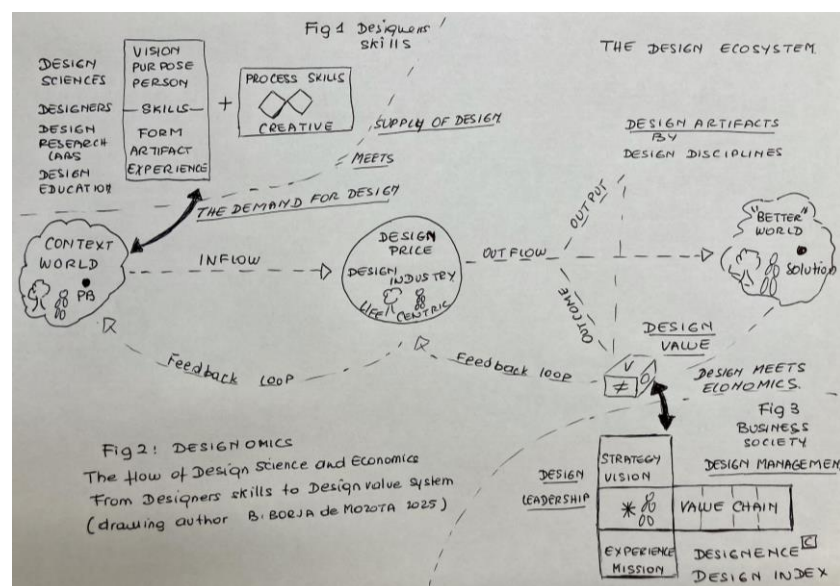
Project	Skills	Key Attributes	Design Role
<b>1. Purpose</b>	<b>Risk-taking, Managing uncertainty, Originality, Anticipating future trends, Forward thinking, Proactive in developing relationships, Open-minded, Understanding multidisciplinary context, Focusing on usability, Attention to detail, Learning from errors</b>	<b>Attitudes and Values</b>	<b>Leader</b>
<b>2. Process</b>	<b>Observation, Researching, Logical thinking, Analyzing, Prioritizing, Structuring problems, Synthesizing, Holistic thinking, Consumer and stakeholder needs, Intuitive thinking and action, Human empathy, Computer skills</b>	<b>Understanding Skills</b>	<b>Researcher</b>
<b>3. Creation</b>	<b>Practical design skills, Prototyping, Drawing ability, Creative techniques, Lateral thinking, Commercial skills, Communication (e.g., presentation, report writing), Scenario building and narrative, Project management, Optimization, Teamwork</b>	<b>Applied Skills</b>	<b>Maker</b>
<b>4. Form</b>	<b>Design process, Materials, Market, Technology, User awareness, Culture, Aesthetics, Manufacturing</b>	<b>Craft Skills</b>	<b>Experiencer</b>

**Figure 1: Design capabilities as sustainable competency in organisations**



Seeing designers as persons with capabilities means understanding them as actors in economics and society. In design 'You Think, and you Do' at the same time as a craftsman. Design skills can prevent economics from separating the head, the heart, the hand in the person, therefore avoiding mental stress and work with no meaning. Design industry is then as a system of design parts (inflow of theories, skills, methods), which must work together as systems do - to accomplish a common purpose of inventing valued 'what do not exist' (fig 2). Adopting Donella Meadows system model illuminates the core principles of design as more than the sum of the parts (Gestalt theory) and as a pragmatic activity creating value.

'Designing my life' was to consciously work on such robust design industry system, developing syndicates, research networks and journals, PhD platforms, education, reference books, master's programs...



**Figure 2: Designonomics: Design industry system flows of value creation**

Figure 2 visualises the loops of the design industry system and its own pattern of behaviour overtime. From the inflow of design knowledge capital to the outflow of artefacts and impact metrics

into a 'better world'. Design is a life centric industry where designers invent forms for human safe space (Kate Raworth doughnut) and makes cultural changes possible. Designers tend to name new design disciplines when the context changes, but the design ecosystem remains the same.

## **Designence© A model for strategic design**

**Designence©** - a model based on our European Research in 2002 - is used to implement Designomics in organisations. Designence© links design knowledge into strategy: corporate, business, brand, experience, (fig3). Designence© transforms abstract business strategies into tangible outcomes aiming at growth, performance, and competitive advantage. It has been implemented successfully across industries, from technology to fashion. It is now developed as a CUBE (Fig4). Strategy is the 'fil rouge' for survival. It is where organisations meet outside societal and competitive challenges, look for the fit with their internal resources and imagine a business model that provides a competitive advantage. Evolving ADN skin of their relation to the world.

**Designence© model and CUBE work around two axes:**

- **Design strategy its vertical axis: from VISION - purpose - to MISSION form. Creating, merging design strategy with corporate strategy.**
- **Design Management its horizontal axis: implementing in all strategies levels: culture, business, HR, communication, brand, finance.**

**At the core of the two axis is the design function - led by Corporate Design Officer or Chief Experience Officer - who aligns design strategy initiatives with business silos and selects design impact metrics.**

<b>VISION / PURPOSE</b>  <b>Design leader</b>  <u><b>Attitude &amp; values skills</b></u>  <b>KPIs</b> -Design to support strategic decisions -Design as a competitive advantage - Design as core competency			
<b>PEOPLE CULTURE</b>  <b>Design storyteller</b>  <u><b>Understanding skills</b></u>  <b>KPIs</b> -Design to change the spirit of the firm -Design to improve circulation of innovation -Design as a know how that transforms society	<b>PROCESS</b>  <b>Design researcher</b>  <u><b>Applied process skills</b></u>  <b>KPIs</b> -Design to develop user centric innovation -Design to improve collaboration -Design to accelerate launch of new product	<b>PORTFOLIO</b>  <b>Design maker</b>  <u><b>Craft skills</b></u>  <b>KPIs</b> -Design as consumer benefits and experience -Design as differentiator vs. competition -Design to make intention real	<b>PERFORMANCE</b>  <b>Design manager</b>  <u><b>Business skills</b></u>  <b>KPIs</b> -Design to increase market share -Design to allow brand premium and IP -Design to create / access new markets. -Design to increase margin
<b>MISSION PERCEPTION</b>  <b>Form giver</b>  <u><b>Sensorial. experiential skills</b></u>  <b>KPIs</b> - Design to generate technology transfer - Design to change relationships -Design to develop emotional relationships			

**Figure 3: Designence©. Vertical & horizontal axis. Design Metrics**

**The Cube is an artefact, which six faces simulate the functions of any organisation: vision, culture, business, portfolio, performance, experience. The six steps of the strategic design process (Balanced Scorecard model). A design project enters one face to focus on competitive, cooperative, sustainable advantage, then changes the whole of relationships.**

**Now, hold the dice in your hand as a metaphor of the context...  
Throw the dice. Imagine a better surface for the dice...  
Can you feel our design responsibility in your body?**



***Figure 4: The "Designence© cube (Designer copyright Hervé Collignon)***

**Now my Life Heroes trapped in a CUBE ... you probably hate me for that...**

**But be pragmatic. This is a simple way to play with design with anyone.**

**Designence© model (fig 3) and CUBE (fig4): scientific Theory + Form.**

### **My wishes for our future**

**As humanity confronts challenges like climate change, IA, social tensions, Designers my Life Heroes you have a pivotal role in humanising technical solutions. By fostering a "life-centred" and cognitive approach, our relational Designomics framework**

highlights how your projects influence societal consciousness. Consider the rise of circular design— facing zero waste, system change, regenerative industries, Designence© model and CUBE prove that sustainability and profitability can go hand in hand.

Meanwhile academic research should continue.

- *Businesses should recognise the materiality in organisation decisions and change d'organisations theories, consequently trusting design by granting the design function its autonomy.*
- *Design communities should develop Design Metrics and consequently training into Executive Board participations.*

Join us on building Design Impact Index and Journey to Corporate Design Executive

To my Life Heroes—designers—your skills are vital in navigating today's complexities. Embrace William Morris' ethos of critical thinking, activism, entrepreneurship, and trust yourselves to ACT

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