Fernando Diego Del Vecchio

Universidad del CEMA, Buenos Aires, Argentina
fdelvecchio@cema.edu.ar

Development of Management Skills for Professional Designers: an Answer to the Present Professional Crisis?[1]

Is Design a devaluated profession? The crisis referred to by many professionals can be understood among different perspectives. One of them – systemic approach – enables the analysis of the complexity underlying the issue. This paper analyses the management skills in response to the ¨drawing artist¨ profile who was many times, incorrectly, named after the professional designer by the market.

Key words:

design, business, management skills

1. Introduction

In the last years, I have heard – from many students and professionals in graphic design – the following statement: '*our profession is devaluated'*. What does "devaluated" mean? Has it lost value? And if that is the case, can anybody explain with clarity which is the value that Graphic design, moreover, that graphic designers bring in? According to my experience, the answer to this question from the graphic designer and clients´ perspectives is completely different.

So as to understand from the heart of the profession what could be the reasons by which designers refer to their own profession in this way, I urged myself to see for these data and read papers that could make me understand the statement.[2] Moreover, profiting from the theoretical environment of my profession – business administration – I tried to understand and explain the meaning of these data.

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[1] Fernando Del Vecchio, "Development of management skills for professional designers: an answer to the present professional crisis?" (paper presented at XX Encuentro Nacional de Escuelas de Diseño Gráfico, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Monterrey, Mexico, October 2009).

[2] Debate ForoAlfa: *¿Which are the causes of deterioration of the profession?* (2009), http://foroalfa.org/es/debate/12/Cuales_son_las_causas_del_deterioro_de_la_profesion

2. Demonstration of the Issue

Many articles published by ForoAlfa[3] make reference to the crisis perceived by Designers: describing regular regrets of Designers related to their clients,[4] protests of Designers due to the lack of studios where to develop their talent or creativity[5] and complaints of Designers owning their own studios, referring to the "switching behavior" of a big mass of designers, rotating permanently among different studios so as to gain the required "experience" that would enable them to become the owners of their own studio.[6]

A regular manifestation made by Graphic Designers, referring to their daily issues they should cope with when working is that: '*clients do not value my work*'. In this way, the protest is displayed when the employers and clients do not wish to pay – according to the same designers – the price their work deserves. The fact that their work does worth less each time (in terms of salary and prices) is one way in which I understand the statement '*devaluated, deteriorated and undervaluated profession*'.

3. Survey on Data Related to the Profession

It is not typical to find data related to the profession. I have consulted the survey performed by Observatorio Laboral,[7] which publishes professional and laboral market polls from Mexico. The survey contains interesting data related to the profession, some of which I will explain in detail.

Comparing three professions – graphic design, administration and marketing one finds the following:

In the last 10 years (period 1998/9 – 2007/8), the number of students at the graphic design career has increased 158%, the number of students at the administration career has increased 58% and the number of students at the marketing career has increased 146%.

Comparing waging levels, one can observe that the wage level of a professional in marketing is placed 24% above the salary of a professional designer; the same occurs with a professional in administration (the salary is 28% above the salary of a professional in graphic design).

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[3] http://www.foroalfa.org/

[4] Guillermo Brea, *Wailing Wall* (2006), http://foroalfa.org/es/articulo/67/El_muro_de_los_lamentos

[5] Román Perona, *Designer "Swiss razor"* (2009), http://foroalfa.org/es/articulo/193/ Disenador_navaja_suiza

[6] Adrián Pierini, *Swallow Designers* (2008), http://foroalfa.org/es/articulo/149/Disenadores_golondrina

[7] http://www.observatoriolaboral.gob.mx/

At the same time if we compare the job relation (that could be interpreted as the percentage of professionals working in different activities directly related with their instruction) one can find the following data: Graphic designer, 62%; marketing, 48%; administrator, 41%.

If one compares the relation between professional and technical levels of the professions above mentioned, one can find that a professional graphic designer earns 28% more than a designer with technical studies (at jobs related is of 71%); a professional with a degree in marketing earns 103% more than a technician in marketing (at jobs related is of 57%); a professional with a degree in administration earns 121% more than a technician in administration (at jobs related is of 57%).

My interpretation of the information is the following:

1. The market understands that – and for that reason benefits in a different way – there is a difference between a professional in administration and in marketing, but not between a professional Graphic designer and a designer with technical Studies.

2. The degree of specificity on the job of a professional Graphic designer and a designer with technical Studies – compared with other professions – could mean that they are less adaptable to work at Jobs not related with their instruction.

As I have already explained in the introduction, using some of the Tools typical of the administration area, I could interpret why the profession is perceived as deteriorated. The first one is the matrix of rivalry amplified,[8] which permits to understand the composition of an industrial sector and from there the existing forces which determine the profitability of the same sector.

4. Factors Related to the Impairment of the Profession: Components of the Industrial Sector

An industrial sector is a Group of companies that produce interchangeable products (Porter 1997, 25). In this industrial sector (graphic design), one can identify the following intervening forces, emerging from the sectors´ components:

1. The rivalry among existing firms (graphic designers), tendency in progress, according to the information provided by the Observatorio Laboral, and with the characteristic of offering services – according to the market – apparently not differentiated (very few differences between professionals and technicians).

2. The bargaining power of buyers (clients), increasingly more now, due to a demand on design does not seem to increase at the same proportion as the number of professionals offering their services.

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[8] One of the ways of naming the structural analysis of industrial sectors. (Porter, 1997: 23).

3. The bargaining power of suppliers (represented by the institutions that offer programs of Studies), at increasing demand due to the interest of a great number of young people for design studies, as well as the number of designers being integrated, is justified by the problem of selling their services to offer training in programs and design Tools.

4. The threat of substitute products or services (represented by informatics tools from nowadays – according to the market and some designers, build up the designer).

5. The threat of new entrants, represented by a number of people interested for "selling" graphic design services not being real Graphics Designers (enabled by the lack of entry barriers which added to the inexistence of exit barriers determine low incomes at low risk).
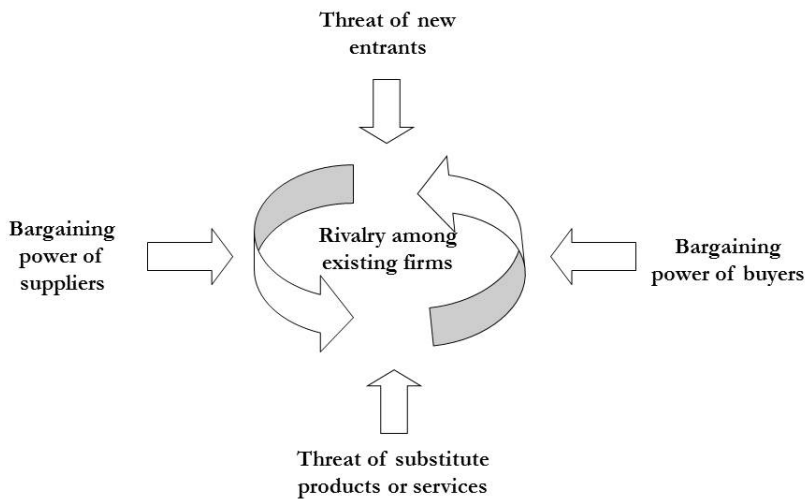

Figure 1: Forces driving industry competition. (Porter, 1997)

The natural articulation of the actuating forces determine, in consequence, a profitability tendency to the low by sector, added to the declaration made by a lot of designers related to the difficulty of getting a job,[9] related to the low salaries being offered, related to the difficulties in achieving an equal price (not a superior one) for the same service offered in previous years.

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[9] Debate ForoAlfa: *¿Why is it so difficult to find a job as designer?* (2009), http://foroalfa.org/es/debate/13/Por_que_es_tan_dificil_conseguir_trabajo_como_disenador

The crisis to which many refer to could mean not only the interaction between forces, that habitually attain a natural equilibrium but also to the fact that – possibly – one is confronting a situation really unusual: a strategic inflection point.

The concept of "strategic inflection point", or forces 10X (to explain the confluence of factors ten times more superior than normal, in terms of strength), was developed by Andrew (Andy) Grove in his book "Only the paranoid survive". In his book, Grove explains that in the event of certain situations like this "strategic inflection point", the basis of the industrial sector is modified to such an extreme that everything seems to crumble (and traditional behavior do not longer work as they did before).

It is possible that in the event of these conditions, the sector could be going through these circumstances. This can be the answer to the statement "*clients do not value my work*", which explains – in my opinion – the awareness of a devaluated, discredited, undervalued and deteriorated profession.

5. Facors which Provoke the Deterioration of the Profession: "Organizational Model" by Gary Hamel

In his book "Leading the revolution", Gary Hamel offers an organizational model which describes a model of organization that he describes in the following way:

Every company[10] is composed of four different models […]. At the base, the "operative model", referring to what employees do every day, how they are organized, what activities they perform, how they treat their clients and which process they manage. Above the operative model one finds the "business model", representing choices, conscious or unconscious that the company has performed related to the different stages of their business concept. Then, above the business model one can find the "mental model", which refers to all beliefs that an individual might have that could encourage the industry success[11]. It is the dominant dogma and formalism related to what clients to serve, what those clients want, how to fix prices, how to organize oneself, what distribution chains to use, etc. And above all one finds the "political model". (Hamel 2000, 204). And he continues as follows: The political model is the way in which the power is distributed in the organization, in particular, the power of imposing mental models. (Hamel 2000, 205).

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[10] The organization (system) in which the model is applied is the industrial sector under study.

[11] According to Senge *"mental models" are suppositions deeply entrenched, generalizations and images that coincide with our way of interpreting the world acting in consequence.* (Senge 1992, 17). *By definition, all mental models are simplifications.* (Senge 1992, 225).
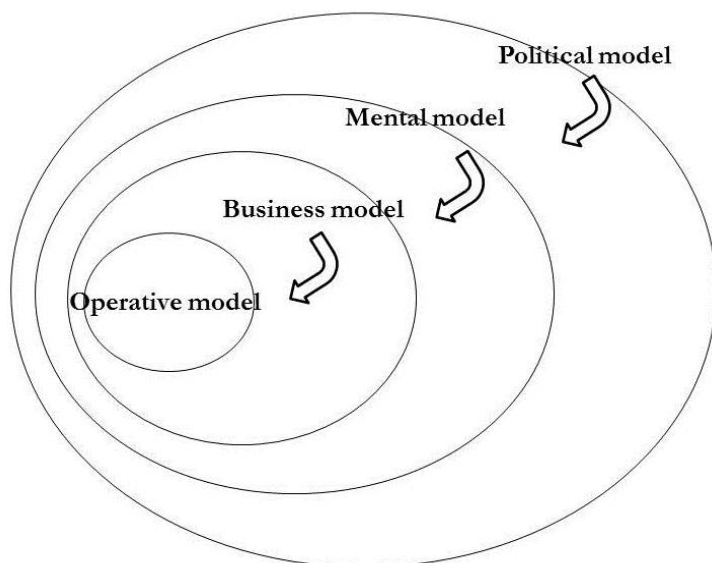
Figure 2: Graphic representation of the models of organization.

The Graphic representation of the models of the organization (interpretation developed by the author of the paper) makes it simple to understand the causative relation among the different and consecutive models. I understand that there exists a relation of inclusion among the different models, according to what Hamel mentioned when he states:

> At the base one can find the "operative model" […]. Above the operative model one can find the "business model" […]. Above the business model, the "mental model" […].Above all, one finds the "political model".

That is to say, the operative model is "conditioned" or limited to the business level and this is conditioned or limited by the mental model and this model is conditioned by the political model.

From the systemic point of view, the system "models of organization" could be represented in a similar way to the sequence "systemic structure, patterns of behavior, facts."[12] (Senge 1992, 57):

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[12] The structure influences the behavior.

Political model

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Mental model (systemic structure)

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Business model (patterns of behavior)
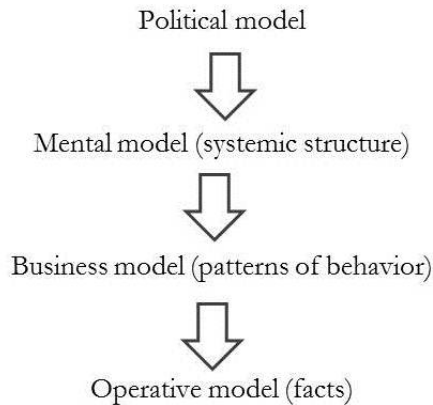
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Operative model (facts)

Figure 3:
Graphic representation of the models of organization from a systemic perspective.

These four models could be thought as a sequence of archetypes "Limits to Growth", [13] that explain the sequence of behavior in a sector. In each case, one finds a limiting condition (limiting factor) – the superior model – generating consequences (conditionings) on the inferior model under the hierarchy explained by Hamel. A problem cannot be solved in the same level of thought in which it has been created,[14] a problem – for example – in the operative model cannot be solved in the same model in which it is presented (but it could be managed in that level) but in the superior level of the hierarchy, that is to say, the business model.
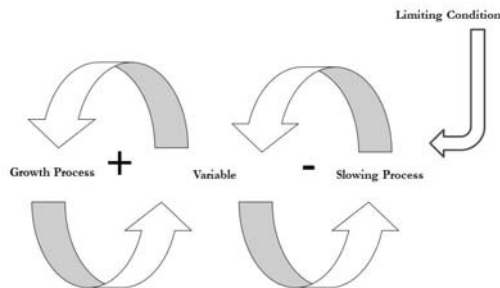

Figure 4: Archetype limits to growth. (Senge, 1992)

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[13] Senge (1992, 125).

[14] *The problem cannot be solved in the same level of thought in which it has been generated.* Quotation attributed to Albert Einstein.

Thinking of a sequence of limitative conditions instead of only explaining the condition or situation, makes me use – to enrich the analysis – the Theory of Restrictions (TOC) by Goldratt.

6. The Weakest Link in the Chain

Goldratt, in his book "The goal", explains that the strength of a chain depends on the strength of the weakest link of the chain. As in the example of the chain, this occurs in any system and in it the "weakest link" could (and must) be indentified – the one in the industrial organization is named "bottleneck" – so as to provide it with more capacity. This is exactly similar to the systemic thinking regarding the answer and treatment in case of a limiting factor as the one in the archetype of limits to growth. The "bottleneck of the system" or restriction, corresponds to the limiting factor that launches the curl in compensation feedback.

The relation between the work of Goldratt and systems dynamics is explained by Fred Kofman in his book "Metamanagement".[15]

Analyzing the archetype, and so as to see its relation with the Theory of Restrictions, its administrative principle (the way in which the condition should be approached) indicates: *"Do not accelerate growth, eliminate the factors that limit growth."* (Senge 1992, 125).

I observe that in the model of the organization made by Hamel, a series of archetypes limit growth, in which each superior model corresponds or works as a limiting factor in relation with its inferior model (for example: the business model conditions – it is a "limiting factor" – the operative model). When have we identified the main and last restriction to the system? I think that it depends on our own mental model, so as to resume the system being analyzed.[16]

Analyzing the case of the model of organization made by Hamel, at the top we have the political model, the superior conditioning factor; and Goldratt says: *"The true restrictions, including in our plant were not the machines but the policies"*.[17] (Goldratt, 2007: 471).

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[15] *"Eliyahu Goldratt, an Israeli physicist who revolutionized the productive systems with his theory of restrictions. Its main application has been in operative Management, but the theory of Glodratt is much more extensive. His ideas are the best methodology that I have encountered to confront systemic problems".* (Kofman 2001, 335). Goldratt makes also reference to this: *Even though the Theory of Restrictions does not explain about the theory of Systems, it was at that time offering an approach by which a complex system could be managed by only some leverage.* (Goldratt 2007, 518).

[16] Senge states that (1992, p. 134): *[…] the structure of the limits to growth also teaches us a lesson. There will always be more limiting processes. When one eliminates or undermines a cause of limitation, growth appears till another limitation arises.* That is to say, once identified a "bottleneck", one should enrich it with capacity till one gets to a new one.

[17] Politics are only decisions of individuals who are in possession of power, the authority and influence to install an specific way of thinking in the organization or system. Those politics condi-

I think that, in the case under analysis, the political model constitutes the main restriction to the system. In this paper, the political model is being represented by the opinion of referents in the sector, about – among some others – the definitions about what design is, the social function of design and about the professional profile of the graphics designer.[18] The opinion of referents (included instructors training Graphic Designers), conditioned the student/professional imposing mental models (the models of the referent). The opinion of the referents, the political model is explained through the work of Raúl Belluccia (2007), regarding expectation and disappointment when receiving instruction in design.[19]

7. Expectation and Disappointment when Receiving Instruction in Graphic Design

Belluccia (2007) explains the expectations of the Graphic design student in respect to a series of issues, presenting the counterpart of Disappointment of the same student when graduating or when getting early in contact with the reality of the profession in the working environment.

Due to this, I will only quote the expectation and disappointment in relation to the designer profile. Belluccia states:

> "The expectation: The designer is a free and independent professional that performs a creative task, not much regulated, not habitual and even enjoyable The designer is a privileged individual that performs what he does. The disappointment: the designer performs a job superconditionated by the context and the demand, many times as an employee with a fixed income. As any other worker, the designer could only attain god results with a lot of efforts". (Belluccia 2007, 43).

The expectations mentioned by Belluccia correspond to the mental model of the Graphic designer, conditioned in its instruction by the referents of the sector that conform the political model. In no way, I am trying to demonstrate that – consciously or unconsciously – the instructors or referents in design act intentionally conditioned in the wrong way the future professionals in design. Maybe, this is a point of investigation, in the university environment, the instructor (and the refe-

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tion the way of thinking of the people who operate the system, determining a model in business (pattern of behavior) and in the end a way of doing things daily (more operative, level of facts).

[18] In relation to this, it is important to read the debates related to these topics in Foroalfa (http://www.foroalfa.com/).

[19] Belluccia states that (2007, p. 9): [This book] It is an imitation of a series of expectations that are normally encouraged at schools of design which makes it difficult, in my opinion, the instruction to make a good Graphics designer, adulterating his essence. They are expectations that exist far away the profession; they are wishes or false belief that constitutes a kind of mythology deeply rooted in certain university environment. The imitations called in this paper ¨disappointment¨, uncover my opinion.

rent) also want to work with the idea represented by "the expectation" (however that in the professional environment the reality is different).

According to this thinking, the mental model of the designer in respect to his behavior at work derives from a lack in management skills (explicit in the business and operative models). This mental model, among others, shows the following pattern: Graphic Designers speak among them about management issues (because their work is to design, what probes the barrier in teaching – in terms explained by Peter Senge – "I am my position"[20]); the instruction and training in this topics is performed by other designers from their own personal experience. It does not exist, at least I have not realized of it, dialogue (neither many intentions of dialogue) in the design and management environment.[21]

So as to obtain different results in the operative model, it is necessary to provoke a kind of disharmony between the mental model (product of the political model) and the business model. The development of management skills is a response to a circumstance, capacities shown at when thinking and assembling the professional activity, from an integrated perspective to other disciplines. This fact does not require any modification regarding what is being taught but how it is being taught.

Conclusion

The models presented herein, using a theoretical frame typical in administration, explain the factors evoked by the perception of the impairment of the profession that many Designers reflect.

Even though it is not possible to assure with certainty, it is much probable that – since the composition of the industrial sector and the forces which interact – the profession might be at a "strategic inflection point" and, in the mid-term, as soon as it gets stabilized, many conditions might turn to be different

In pursue of this new stabilization, new questions are arising related to the profession and new challenges too. These new questions bring new and different professionals that would diagram a different mental model. Since the analysis presented for the model of organization from Hamel, new referents will determine a new mental model that will compose a different professional model.

Is it necessary to instruct graphic designers in a different way? Is it necessary to have a new professional profile? What will the profile of the Graphic de-

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[20] *He teaches us to be loyal at work, to the extreme of misguiding our identity […] when they are asked how they earn a living, people often describe the tasks they perform every day, not the aim of the company they are part of.* (Senge 1992, 29).

[21] There exist some isolated cases as in subjects like Management at the Post graduate Certificate in Design at the Universidad de Palermo, or the Program on Strategic Management in Design at the Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Urbanismo of the Universidad de Buenos Aires.

signer in the XXI century be? The answers are not, in my opinion, in what is being taught but in how it is being taught. The development of management skills, do not necessarily need to be incorporated in the basic instruction but it is necessary that student understand that, nowadays - and this is deeply rooted in the profession - talent is necessary but not enough.

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Фернандо Диего Дел Векио

Универзитет Дел ЦЕМА, Буенос Аирес, Аргентина
fdelvecchio@cema.edu.ar

Унапређивање вештина менаџерства за професионалне дизајнере:
одговор на актуелну кризу у професији?

У овом раду се анализира развој менаџерских вештина за профил професионалног дизајнера – „уметника-цртача“, како се често погрешно категорише. У последњих неколико година, велики број студената и професионалаца из области дизајна најчешће изјављује: „Наша професија је потцењена!“, и „Клијенти не цене мој рад!“ Да ли је дизајн заиста потцењена професија у савременом друштву? Према резултатима истраживања тржишта рада у Мексику долази се до неких занимљивих закључака везаних за поменуту проблематику: друштво обично разуме разлику у професионалном (образовном) нивоу у, на пример администрацији, али не и између типова дизајнера. Што је ужа специјализација професионалних дизајнера, то је њихова прилагодљивост мања у другим областима дизајнирања, у поређењу са другим професијама, и проблем може настати у комуникацији са клијентом. У потрази за решењем, нужно је усавршавање дизајнера у овом смеру.

Пословни свет сваким даном постаје све сложенији и захтевнији, а по питању комуницирања – одређенији. Како постоје потешкоће у комуникацији долази и до проблема због чињенице да послодавци обично не желе да одвоје онолико новца колико дизајнер тврди да вреди његов рад. Пошто се овај рад награђује све мање (у смислу цене), превладава уверење да је дизајнерска професија потцењена.

Са појављивањем нових изазова, питања која из тога произилазе захтевају нова размишљања. Начин и правила комуницирања могу бити мање или више детаљно одређени, али само од људи, тј. од појединаца, зависи хоће ли добром комуникацијом остварити већу хармонију односа и бољу ефикасност организације.

Менаџмент у свим пословним и организационим активностима чини организација људи, како би ефективно постигли жељене циљеве и ефикасно обавили задатке. Менаџмент у дизајну треба истовремено да говори језиком бизниса и језиком дизајна.

Стицање менаџерске вештине не мора бити део обавезног образовања, али је потребно да се схвати да таленат (схваћен као техничка способност дизајнера) јесте неопходан, али није довољан. Да ли је неопходно да се формира другачији дизајнер? Да ли је потребан нови струковни профил дизајнера у друштву? Какав је профил дизајнера 21. века?