

# Designing Business and Management

**Edited by**  
Sabine Junginger  
and Jürgen Faust

B L O O M S B U R Y

# **DESIGNING**

**BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT**



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**SABINE JUNGINGER  
AND JÜRGEN FAUST**

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO DESIGNING BUSINESS

*Jürgen Faust and  
Sabine Junginger*

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Business in many segments is no longer sustainable. Many managers today must revisit and restate what business they and their organizations are in. Increasingly, business models that have worked for years, sometimes decades, are cracking under the weight of social, technological, economic, and environmental changes. In the search for new ways forward, many of the traditional tools are ill-suited to develop the way forward. How should one go about solving a problem when one does not yet know the problem? How should one go about making a decision when the criteria for the decision have yet to be understood? How do we conceive of radically new forms of business, come up with new business models, envision new products and new services, identify, discover or generate new resources?

Recently, design, or more specifically design thinking and other new domains of designing, such as service design, have attracted attention among business managers and many types of organizations. It is hoped a design approach will improve service provisions and develop innovative services and products. However, few of these design-driven projects inquire into how design relates or contributes to core issues and problems of business and management. Nonetheless, we can trace the origins of “designing business” to earlier work that looked at organizational or social problems as issues of design. These include, among others, *The Sciences of the Artificial* by Herbert Simon (1969 [1996]).

Simon adamantly positions both social planning and organizational problems as urgent issues of design to which design thinking and design methods apply and, more importantly, for which a design approach is necessary to arrive at alternative solutions. Designing in Simon’s view, however, merely means to configure, to assemble and reassemble existing parts; that is, to

choose from given alternatives to achieve outcomes as they “ought” to be, not as they might be. This focus on discovery implicitly accepts organizational structures and business as given, with little space for re-envisioning, re-imagining, and re-inventing organizational systems.

In hindsight, Simon overlooks much of the creative and emergent characteristics of design—the very aspects of design required for designing business. However, he does point to gaps between design thinking and design doing and laments that the decision criteria recommended by business professionals seldom find application or implementation in everyday organizational life. Moreover, Simon recognizes that designing is an activity many different people engage in. Even “members of an organization or a society for whom plans are made are not passive instruments, but are themselves designers who are seeking to use the system to further their own goals,” he observes (Simon, 1969 [1996], p. 153). Curiously, human experience and human interaction do not seem to factor into a design challenge. Instead, Simon sees the challenge simply as one of resolving misfits between interacting components and moving parts. Succeeding in resolving these misfits means to arrive at a configuration that satisfies as a solution.

Simon’s foray into organizational design and organizational behavior remains relevant to designing business. And although he merely looked to “configure” organizations, he nonetheless highlighted the configuration of organizations “whether business corporations, governmental organizations, voluntary societies or others” to be “one of society’s most important design tasks” (Simon, 1969 [1996], p. 154). Designing business acknowledges the importance of these design tasks while offering different views on the nature of design, the purpose and the tasks involved in designing.

Designing business as an idea owes much to Richard Boland and Fred Collopy who, as scholars at the Weatherhead School of Management, initiated conversations around managing as designing when they found management as a profession to be “in a difficult situation” (Boland and Collopy, 2004, p. 7). Picking up both the strengths and the weaknesses of Simon’s design understanding, they identify the need for a design attitude in management practice and in the management profession. Their 2002 conference *Managing as Designing* marks a key event for research into designing business. The resulting book *Managing as Designing* (2004) critically engages with what Boland refers to as the dominant “decision attitude toward problem solving” in management practice and management education (p. 6). Both the book and the initial conference have successfully brought together researchers and practitioners from different disciplines interested in exploring issues of designing in business and management.<sup>1</sup> It has also spawned new and important research into what a design attitude implies (Michlewski, 2015).

Among those whose thinking has strongly influenced research into designing business and management from its inception is Richard Buchanan. The former head of the School of Design at Carnegie Mellon University has since joined the Weatherhead School of Management. His writings on “Wicked Problems of Design Thinking” (1992), “Rhetoric, Humanism and Design” (1995), and “Management and Design: Interaction Pathways in Organizational Life” (2004) count among the key literature, as does the special issue of *Design Issues* on Organizational Change (2008), which he co-edited. Buchanan, too, expands on the notion of design across different domains of professional practice. But he also reminds us that designing is about enhancing the human experience. Designing business therefore acknowledges that both business and design are concerned with “the” social, and that managing and designing are activities that are social at heart (Faust and Auricchio 2011).

As much as the concept of designing business has begun to take shape, there remain many questions as to what changes in thinking and doing “designing business” imply and require. This book presents critical reflections on concepts, methods, and practices relevant to designing business in an effort to find answers to these questions. There are two main reasons why we considered this book worthwhile. First, we felt encouraged by the depth and growing sophistication of the discussions that we are having. Much of the thinking that informed our initial conversations on designing business has now matured and become more theoretically grounded and illustrated through practical application by case studies. We want to make this knowledge accessible to a wider group of readers and anyone interested in the topic and issues. Secondly, design is now approached from different academic and professional angles. Yet, what or where design is or what constitutes a business in these different explorations is not always clearly articulated.

Indicative of these developments is current research in the field of gaming and simulation, where design questions now center on whether it is possible to calculate risks by simulating business situations through game applications (e.g., Thavikulwat and Pillutla, 2008). Other developments include research into and around business model design (e.g., Ostenwalder *et al.*, 2005; Youngwook *et al.*, 2008). Numerous efforts to establish design thinking in business and management (e.g., Rogers, 2005; Brown, 2008; Liedtka and Ogilvie, 2011) have to be considered part of this just as much as research that looks into the role of design in policy, public management, and public organizations (e.g., Briggs, 2011; Eppel *et al.*, 2011; Bason, 2014). The above is complemented by other work, such as that on design and management information systems (Garud *et al.*, 2008), design and entrepreneurship (Sarasvathy, 2008), and design in innovation (Boddington *et al.*, 2011).

We could offer endless more examples—which in itself is a sign that design and business have more in common than we generally acknowledge. At the same time, these collective works indicate the emergence of designing business as a field of research and practice. From an academic perspective, this immense curiosity about design and designing in and across different disciplines begins to beg for a search for commonalities in these design explorations. What are the key questions here? How do we frame this discourse? What is being addressed, what not? What are we overlooking? Not least because of this curiosity, we see a need as well as an opportunity for critical reflections and inquiries that can help us understand more fully the foundations and implications of designing business. Furthermore, in order to have a sense of the evolving discourse about designing business, we have to consider that discontinuity (Foucault, 1972) dominates a field of research, ensuring pre-eminent gaps in our analysis of the field.

Simultaneously, we are volunteering our view of designing business. For us, designing business involves inquiries into what a business is, does or stands for, how it goes about producing some “thing” and how it creates value. Designing business therefore depends on an understanding of what “the business” of an organization is: What is it the organization cares about, that it is troubled by? One of the obvious troubles of many businesses today is the need to re-orient itself to serve people and their communities better. It is troubling because it involves changes in organizational culture, organizational structures, and, from a designing business perspective, a change in design attitudes (Michlewski, 2008) and organizational values. If anything, this illustrates a deep connection between designing business and human-centered design. Moreover, it concerns matters of sustainability and efficiency.

Our view on designing business follows the idea that conducting business, like management, is at its heart a human and social activity (Falk, 1961; Yunus, 2011). Designing business acknowledges the presence of design activities and design practices in organizations, by management and by many others that often go unnoticed (Gorb and Dumas, 1987; Junginger, 2015), and are therefore taken for granted and escape reflection (Schön, 1983). Designing business seeks to make accessible how designing works in business, management, and organizations.

Designing business encourages us to reflect on doing business, on being in business, and on the purpose of business from a design perspective. Like our views of design, business definitions have also changed over time and like design, there is no one view of business to which everyone agrees or can agree. As a result, for some, business merely refers to the reality of being busy and occupied (Weber, 1927 [2012]); for others, it is a social act that expresses care (Dewey, 1948); some people think of business purely in the sense of a machine

to make money or achieve the highest possible return on investment; yet others consider going into business as an opportunity to be entrepreneurial and independent. These different views sometimes blur what we understand to be the purpose of business. Not long ago, it was as simple as producing material goods or services (Barnard, 1968). For Peter Drucker (cf. Watson, 2002), the purpose of a business is to generate and maintain customers. In Drucker's view, businesses (i.e., enterprises) are paid by people to create wealth for people. Creating wealth, though, goes beyond making money and monetary wealth. Money, in Drucker's view, is secondary in that it merely is an affirmation that the products developed and delivered by a business provide a value that customers are willing to buy. What Drucker highlights is that money is important to business but not its product and not its purpose. This view is echoed in the work of Nobel Laureate Mohammed Yunus, for whom profit-making is a business need but not a business purpose. The business purpose, in Yunus's view, is to add to social wealth.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of which view of business we agree with, or whatever we consider to be the purpose of business, the purpose we value the most will drive our findings, our design. It is for this reason that designing business concerns itself with how we are performing our tasks; the ways we go about designing our organizations as well as all parts and aspects of what we comprehend when talking about business models.

We take these conversations and developments as starting points for our reflection on design as a discipline highly relevant for business. It is our hope that this book can serve as a platform for this reflection and contribute to the development of theories and practice in this new area.

## THE BOOK CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

We hope this book contributes to the rapidly growing area of cross-disciplinary research at the boundaries of social business, social entrepreneurship, innovation studies, design management, social design, organizational design, and design research. Selected contributions by leading design and management scholars clarify the relevance and implications of designing in the business context. Taken together, the chapters sketch important issues, concepts, and principles, which apply when the purpose of doing business shifts to enhance human living. Moreover, the book offers insights into practices of designing and managing, their commonalities as well as their distinctions, and thereby begins to point to boundaries and limitations of design in business, too. Because we are limited in what we can include in a book, the full set of provocations remains accessible online.<sup>3</sup> What follows is a chapter-by-chapter overview.