

Understanding workforce integration:  
Examining how consulting firms might better  
integrate their design and innovation units

by

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## UNDERSTANDING WORKFORCE INTEGRATION

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### **Abstract**

This research paper begins and ends with a sincere and pragmatic question – how might consulting firms more effectively integrate their design and innovation units within their broader workforce? This researcher embarked upon this course of research in order to generate a series of recommendations that might relieve some of the tensions around workforce integration. These tensions, described to this researcher by those within the design and innovation units and by consultants within the primary line of business of a firm, led the researcher to ultimately believe that the challenge around workforce integration might be best understood through the divergent value-chains that the consulting firm and its design and innovation unit espoused. Grounded in a literature review and interviews with participants from both consulting firms and their recently acquired design and innovations units, this paper would provide the basis for a set of recommendations that might ultimately better align a consulting firm’s value-chain with that of its design and innovation unit. This in turn would underpin the goal of this research paper, to provide a way forward for consulting firms to better integrate their recently acquired design and innovation workforces.

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## **Chapter One - Introduction**

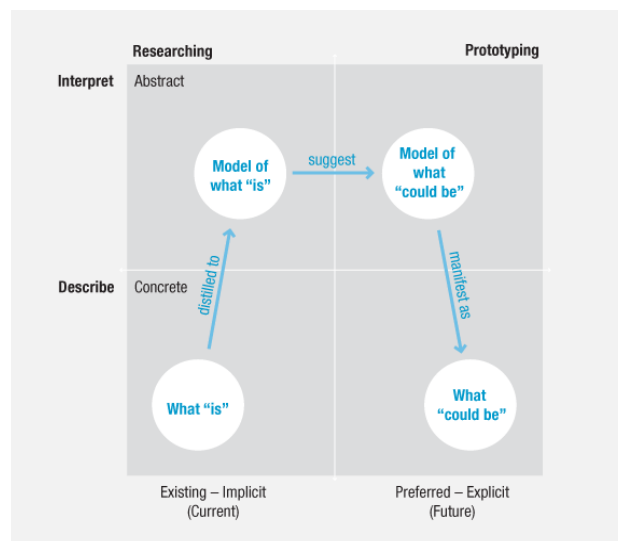
In the spring of 2016, this researcher was nearing completion of a design and innovation graduate degree program and evaluating next steps. Aware of the recent popularization of design thinking in business, and also interested in a career in consulting, this researcher began investigating career opportunities at a number of consulting firms. In this initial scan, it became apparent that many of these larger consulting firms had recently invested in design and innovation units as a means to expand their offerings to clients. At this time, the researcher had also begun to hear from colleagues within consulting that there were certain tensions between the workforces of the broader consulting firm and their recently acquired design and innovation units. These included team challenges at client-sites, misunderstandings with new colleagues, and general misalignment around how the new teams might best work together. What this caused was distrust in the workplace, lack of confidence within teams, and downright frustration among colleagues who seemingly failed to understand both what one and other did and might provide the other by way of value. The tensions, while anecdotal, were crucial in steering this researchers interest and to build a research project around generating a better appreciation of workforce integration. At the root of this is this researchers belief that, if these tensions go unchecked, they might well spiral out of control and have broader, potentially negative impacts on how value is created, captured, and delivered within these firms. Moreover, such a deleterious action may permanently

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damage the reputation of design thinking – noted to be in ascendance within the business world – whose generative processes power design and innovation consulting. Deciphering a way to allay the impact of these tensions – and the harm they cause within these workforces – and how they are manifested through disparate value-chains is therefore the main problem this paper will explore. This will be done by looking at how the distinct value-chains within two firms coming together – expressed by the way they traditionally (or innovatively) create, capture, and deliver value – might impact workforce integration itself (Porter, 1985). Explored in greater detail below, these disparate value-chains can be bundled as the consulting firms ability to scale, effectively and efficiently industrializing solutions to address their clients' problems; posited firmly against the bespoke approach of the design and innovation firm to create uniquely tailored and comprehensive solutions for their clients. These two approaches – the bespoke versus the scalable – stand opposite one and other like the Gates of Gibraltar. To understand how to possibly reconcile and better integrate these workforces, this project will focus on delving deeper into the tensions and how they in turn are manifested through value-chains that seem to stand so solemnly in opposition to one and other. This broad approach is grounded in one, an initial leap - that whatever was being done to integrate the workforces was leading to said tensions; and two, pragmatism, since this researcher was fearful that investments in design and innovation would be jettisoned should issues such as the ones described above might lead to the loss of value for a consulting firm. While understanding the value chains will be the vehicle of understanding, the heart

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of this problem is the tension – the frustration, mistrust, and misunderstandings – that obstructs the smooth integration of two work forces with varying value chains. All of this would ultimately combine into the ultimate subject of this research paper: how might consulting firms more effectively integrate their design and innovation units within their broader workforce? To address this question, the researcher returned to the concept of value-chains, seeking to decipher ways to better align a consulting firms value-chain with that of the design and innovation units – perhaps couching the bespoke within the scalable, to be explained in later chapters - as a way to better integrate these workforces.



*Figure 1. The Analysis-Synthesis Bridge Model (Dubberly, Evenson, & Robinson, 2008)*

This research paper is composed of five chapters, this introduction being the first. Here the author will share the reasoning that propelled this journey while also laying the framework for the investigation that follows. Throughout this exploration, many elements were informed by the application of an abridged



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Analysis-Synthesis Bridge Model (see Figure 1 above). This begins with describing the existing situation, the conversations in chapter one, in the bottom left quadrant (Dubberly, Evenson, & Robinson, 2008). In Chapter Two, the author provides a literature review that contextualizes elements that underpin the discussion surrounding design thinking and its recent popularization in business, along with the increasing rate of investment in design and innovation units by consulting firms. Most importantly, this chapter looks at both the consulting firm and its design and innovation units and highlights the misalignment between their two value-chains. This in turn is the abstraction of the current model, which flows this project into the upper left quadrant, and sets the stage for the following chapter to focus on the methodology used to generate insights around workforce integrations. To generate these insights, this research conducted fieldwork through interviews with members of a consulting firm's primary line of business, management consultants, and their design and innovation units. The findings follow this, in Chapter Four, which brings this project into the upper right quadrant, and further assembles the components of this paper to reveal a set of recommendations for consulting firms interested in leveraging their newly integrated workforces. As mentioned above, this researcher sought to understand what was causing the tensions described above by consultants and designers, within the firms and their sub-units. In this exploration, interviews would show that one of the primary causes of this tension was the inherent complexity of integrating workforces. The findings reinforce the initial tensions that this researcher observed, that consulting firms are encountering

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challenges when integrating the workforces behind their investment in design and innovation firms. However, in articulating a way forward - flowing the findings through the conceptual upper right quadrant of the abridged Analysis-Synthesis Bridge Model - the researcher uncovered that some of this tension was shaped as much by the pipeline that shapes these workforces: such as academic programs, and includes recent graduate students themselves, along with in-firm training programs (Dubberly, Evenson, & Robinson, 2008).

While all new hires into a firm are not necessarily recent graduates, many who join consulting firms as designers and innovators today are the product of the recent surge in design thinking's popularity. The result? The final chapters discuss the findings and provide a set of recommendations that target not only consulting firms and their training programs, but also take into account considerations for academic programs, and their recent graduates. Through this process the researcher took the as-is and reimagined what could-be, allowing them to discern points of intervention within the integration and which play a role in shaping how workforce integrations unfold. While the model in its application is abridged - it doesn't go so far as to describe the roll out of a preferred future - it nonetheless allows for the casting of one by exploring the recommendations provided in looking at a what if - what if certain recommendations were implemented and what would that consulting firm (and its design and innovation unit) look like in the future? Again, the challenge here is to support workforce integration by fostering the alignment of various value-chains within a firm and its subunit. This approach was useful in recognizing that issues arising downstream - for example, tensions at a

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client-site - are shaped by factors upstream - in this case, academic programs, employee training programs, or communication programs. Identifying them as such allowed for a distillation of the findings into a set of recommendations aimed at these points of interventions targeting these workforces through remedies aimed primarily at consulting firms, but also other elements that influence the integration of workforces. This allows for, in theory, the alignment of the value-chains and relief of the critical tensions noted above and throughout this project. This is not exhaustive (and points to ways forward in the conclusion for further research), but it does genuinely reflect the findings that this researcher uncovered in conversations with members of design and innovation units and management consultants alike: that many of the issues that they experienced might be addressed by efforts earlier in the process of integration. Again, the main effort in the final recommendations will still fall on consulting firms to address the tensions around workforce integration, but this approach equally acknowledges the role certain elements have when shaping the way these tensions might play out.

The outcome of this research is a series of recommendations that target certain points of intervention, aimed at relieving some of the tensions around workforce integration as described by those within the design and innovation units and by consultants within the primary line of business of the firm. Accordingly, this paper also includes recommendations for academic programs and those graduates interested in a possible career in consulting. As with any research journey, what came to the forefront was insightful

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commentary about what a firm was either doing, or not, to integrate design and innovation units into the broader workforces: some of this was tinged with fear, other with anger, and much of it a sense of apprehension – of the unknown – as two work forces from different worlds altogether, would literally collide at the client site. In this researchers' opinion, the task centred around providing the reader with a richer story – included in the pages to follow – that describes how this situation came to be and underpins the rise of design thinking in business, and highlights the opportunities around better integrating workforces. Returning to the heart of the research question this paper asks, this project aims to provide a possible way forward for consulting firms to better integrate their workforces by identifying possible leverage around points of interventions within the integration journey.

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## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter aims to provide the contextual backbone of this research project - this paper and its ensuing chapters - by focusing on the substance that underpins how consulting firms may better integrate their design and innovation units within their broader workforce. As a literature review, it collates the insights of current industry leaders, thinkers, and observers and their writings on the popularity of design thinking within consulting and the resulting series of acquisitions of design and innovation units by consulting firms. This in turn serves as an abstraction of the situation as described in the first chapter, and allows the reader to grasp some of the elements that have shaped why consulting firms have invested so swiftly in design and innovation, and highlight why design and innovation units may also have been keen to see this happen as well. To better understand some of the supporting elements behind this story, the following chapter will also explore how these organizations define and generate value - their value-chains - by ultimately standing them up against each other. Doing this will ultimately demonstrate the chasm that seemingly exists between the two, as touched upon in the previous chapter, and how this misalignment between a consulting firms' industrialized, scalable approach to providing solutions stands opposite to the more bespoke, tailored approach towards solutioning exuded by design and innovation firms. For this project, this meant moving into the upper left quadrant of the abridged Analysis-Synthesis Model (recall Figure 1) to prepare for an impending lateral move into another quadrant in later chapters.

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Accomplishing this will allow the following chapter to hone in on this research project's primary issue, to inform a set of recommendations around how consulting firms might address the tensions around workforce integrations.

The contemporary narrative is that “design thinking has arrived”, but in reality, generative approaches to innovation have been part of the way many businesses conduct themselves: Ford, General Electric, and International Business Machines have all innovated - products, processes, or both - at one point or another in the last century (Drucker, 1998; Kolko, 2015). Today, innovations freshest face is that of design thinking, and business leaders have sought to adopt its tenets as the best way to stay ahead of the disruptive and ever-advancing curve of technology, which Clayton Christensen describes as the relentless process by which a bottom-market entrants product or service can quickly usurp that market's incumbent leader (Christensen, 2016).

Modeled as reflections of the latest trends in business, consulting firms have never considered themselves immune to the various market forces - from the war for talent through to coping with new tools like big data and technology, through dealing with upstart competitors - though in the face of such rapid changes across the industry, many observers have recently called for the consulting model to adapt or risk falling victim to insurgent competitive forces (Christensen, Wang, & van Bever, 2013; Porter, 1979). Some suggest that consulting will become more creative, shedding their proverbial pressed collars, to instead become more like the businesses they've invested so heavily in acquiring. This can be compared to the similar path that marketing

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communications agencies took in the previous decade, chronicled with wit by Jules Ehrhardt who traces the evolution of the big marketing firms and their track record of expansion by acquiring their competition in adjacent yet complementary industries (e.g. public relations, digital media, media buyers, etc.) (Ehrhardt, 2016). Buying these smaller boutique agencies provided the larger firms with the added capacity - service offerings - that they in turn could leverage to their clients, thus keeping their clients' business under one roof or agency. Following this one-stop-shop approach, a similar path would permit consulting firms to expand and more importantly compete with other industries by growing their services to address the ever-changing needs of their clients. Although it is outside the scope of this paper to deliberate on the potential for sparring between consulting firms and their colleagues in marketing communications as Jules Ehrhardt does in detail, recent events (e.g. Accenture acquiring ad giant Karmarma) suggest the fight is well underway (Walford 2016; Ehrhardt, 2016). What is within scope for this project is the need to fold some of this insight into our contextual understanding on the motivation behind consulting's foray in design thinking.

For the purpose of this research, defining design thinking will begin with a definition from Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO, whose firm popularized "design thinking [as] a human-centred approach to innovation that [...] integrates the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success" ("Design Thinking", 2016). At its heart is a problem-solving approach that builds many possible solutions from a nuanced understanding of

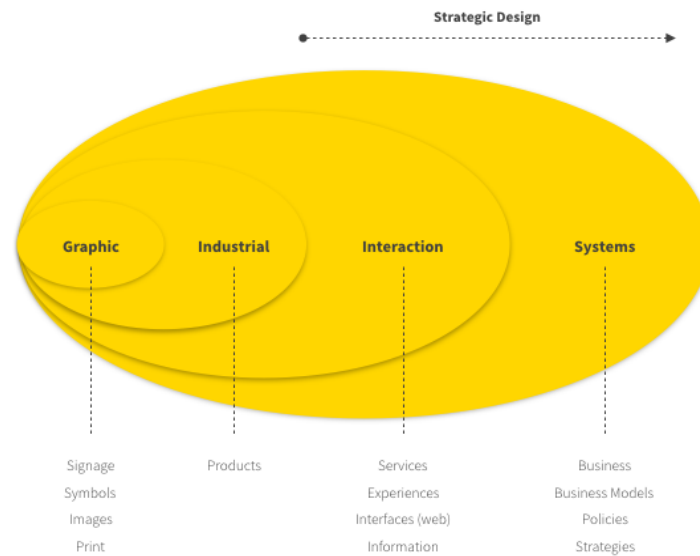
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many inputs - including the problem itself, along with people, processes, services, or technologies – and then resolves itself around a uniquely better way of *doing*. While this paper does not deal directly with Wicked Problems per se - defined as inherently complex, undefined, systemically broad issue with untold entanglements, it is important to note that design thinking has excelled as a means to address the increasing number of wicked problems facing today's society (Buchanan, 1992). Another way to look at design thinking is through the words of Robin Lanahan of Microsoft, who describes design thinking as “the ability to combine empathy for the context of a problem, creativity in the generation of solutions, and rationality to analyze and fit solutions to the context” (Lanahan, 2012). These definitions stand in contrast to the Taylorism of traditional business thinking; Taylorism is the theory of management that epitomizes rational and scientific methods as a means to increasing efficiency (Kanigel, 2005). It is best exemplified on the shop factory floors of industry, though its influence goes well beyond the colour of one's collar since it shaped the way many businesses organized their people, their processes, and technology throughout the twentieth century.

While Christopher McKenna points out, in his *Origins of Modern Management Consulting*, while Taylorism and consulting were at first at odds, over the course of the last century the former came to dominate the latter with the industrial corporate mindset permeating how consulting firms would optimize and reorganize their client's processes, people, and technology (McKenna, 1995).



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*Figure 2. The Evolution and Transformation of Design Thinking (Curi, 2016)*

Returning to design thinking: the same way agriculture simultaneously grew out of many ancient river valleys - civilizations in the Indus-Ganges, Tigris-Euphrates, Nile, and Huang He Rivers stumbled on agricultural methods around the same time - design thinking followed a similar path (Toynbee, 1972). Some schools created disciples that within a generation would change the way businesses, industries and sometimes whole sectors approached problem solving. Contemporary design has its roots in the creation of objects, better – this aesthetic, early twentieth century Bauhausian desire to create better things has evolved into the application of design to processes, experiences, and systems, spanning diverse disciplines and entire sectors, known as transdisciplinary design, visually represented above in Figure 2 (Curi, 2016). Designing for the increasingly complex world, design thinking now counts many varieties, from systemic design through design research, many of which are blossoming to create new fields of study and application.

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This in turn can be broken down with even more nuance, as seen in Figure 3 below from Liz Sanders, that shows the richness of the evolving design thinking and design research landscape (Sanders, 2008). To narrow this focus, this paper will highlight the impact design thinking has had on solving problems, or to put it another way: the very process that design thinking begets. Although the application of design thinking will depend on the business of a particular company or organization, the divergent and convergent process, of iterative open-door thinking, brings with it a refreshing lens to defining, (re) framing, and addressing a problem and its parts by creating choices and in turn emboldening participants of the process to make better decisions (Brown, 2009). This can be broken down more neatly - visualized below in Figure 4 - as a feedback loop that involves a continuous process of empathizing, defining, ideating, prototyping, and testing that leverages a creative and open mindset (“Bootleg Bootcamp”, 2011). For some this process can mean improving a customer experience; others, it could be humanizing and optimizing an exhaustive process, while for some it could result in the creation of innovative models, services, or systems. This reflects design thinking as an inherently creative process that stands in contrast to previous approaches – such as Taylorism - which were coming up short in the face of increasingly disruptive innovations and complex problems. The nimbleness of design thinking process, championed by the d.school at Stanford University, permits an agility that can greatly improve products, processes and services, and thus bolster the capacity of organizations and businesses to adapt, innovate, and generate value. In all of this, it is important to recall that design

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thinking is inherently adaptive, and its definition is certain to evolve as generative approaches allow it to further adapt to today's rapidly changing business environment.

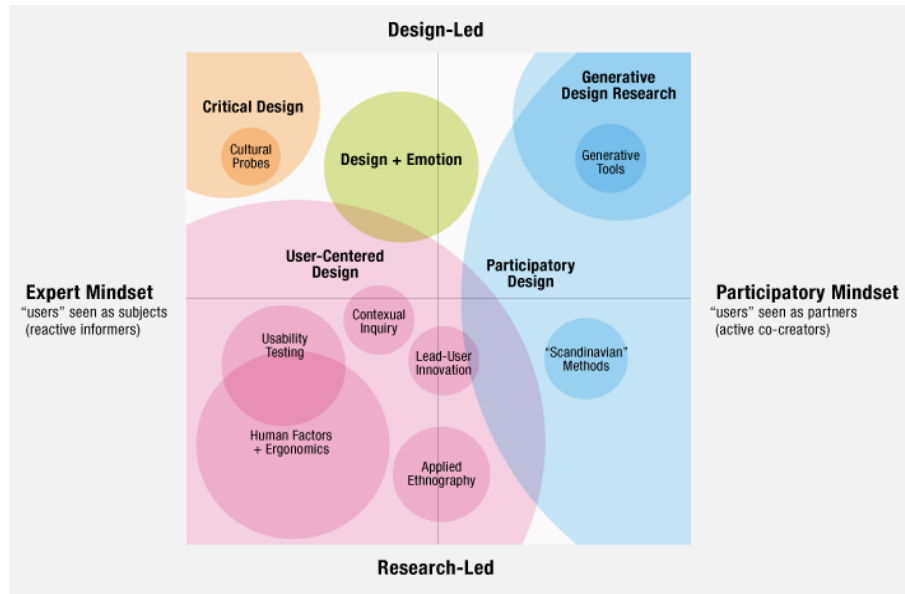
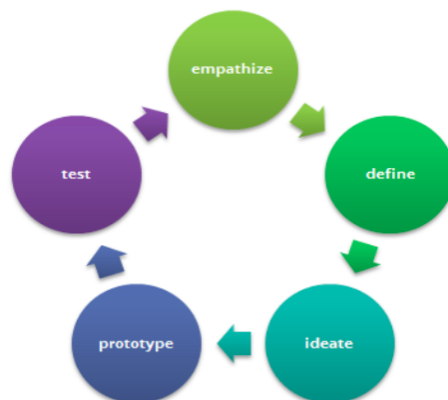


Figure 3. An Evolving Map of Design Practice & Design Research (Sanders, 2008)

It is likely no coincidence that the increased attention to design thinking coincides with the increasing pace and scale (and complexity) of innovation and the change that it is bringing to many industries. This proverbial 'fifth column' is called disruption, and it has quickly become the new norm for which businesses must plan, prepare and thrive. While centered on the Canadian market, a recent Deloitte study evaluating the impact of disruption and gauging the preparedness of the economy is indicative: the findings suggest that most industries are not. (Stuart, Currie, Goodham, & Ives, 2015). This pressure comes not only in the form of extreme market forces – channelling Christensen's disruption along with that of Porter's Five Forces –

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but also from the business's very own customers, who increasingly have come to expect products, processes and services to adapt to their needs (Christensen, 2016; Porter, 1979). These two pressures combine to increase the need for businesses and organizations to continually innovate. Enter design thinking and its application of a process-driven lens to tackle the shifts that are rocking how a business's technology, people and processes align to generate value. Design thinking accomplishes this by fostering - and leveraging - a process steeped in empathy, creativity, and rationality (Lanahan, 2012). This openness, to constantly re-framing and reorienting, gives design thinkers license to explore and generate solutions that leverage perspectives that others often neglect. This results in a thoroughly generative approach that values equal amounts of divergence and convergence around a problem (Brown, 2009). This is vital, as many businesses have traditionally had only one option when it came to adjusting to thrive in new environments like the one described earlier. From market competition to the impact of new technology to large-scale transformative change, the path often led to consulting firms that had evolved to provide their clients with profitable and sustainable solutions.



*Figure 4. The Design Loop, adapted from Standord's d.school (Bootleg Bootcamp, 2011)*

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Building off this understanding of design thinking, it is equally important to look across the table to consulting firms to appreciate how they approach capturing, generating, and delivering value, in their value-chain. For the sake of this paper, the following discussion focuses on the larger multinational consulting firms, such as McKinsey, PwC, Deloitte, Accenture, Ernst & Young, and KPMG, and is informed by conversations with management consultants across these (and other) firms. First, this researcher feels compelled to briefly explain the rationale behind lumping all of these firms together when each clearly uses different assets to contribute to their respective value-chains: some are big on technology, others are known for strategy and operations, while others have defined their own niches. First, regardless of its function - and therefore the resources it will draw (see matrix, below) – each firms’ value-chains is augmented by its capacity to scale their unique, proprietary solutions. So, whether it is technology implementation versus strategy consulting, what the firm does is less important to this researcher than how the value they generate is delivered. In this case it is the emphasis on the scalable (versus the bespoke) that differentiates larger consulting firms from its smaller cousins. Secondly, the firms are treated generally since much of what happens inside a firm is protected from outside view. While certain elements, such as whether a firm runs off a publically traded versus a partnership model, will have an impact on workforce integration; this internal variation that cannot be faithfully discerned renders it less impactful for this study. Similar to asking for performance numbers concerning a firms investment in design and innovation, the utter lack of

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access for an outsider like this researcher led this project down the path of generalization. This in turn helped to focus this paper on these firms approaches, as the best way to understand and address the tensions around integrating workforces.

To begin, it's important to recall that these firms grew around their clients demands to solve ever-challenging problems - built off the pedestal of nearly a century of management consulting experience and best practices (McKenna, 2005). Consultants across this industry excelled at delivering the solutions that their clients required in order to stay competitive and grow their advantage over others. For decades, consultants sought to generate value for their firms and its clients by approaching problems with an expanding toolbox of approaches. While there are some examples of consulting gone astray – such as the Enron fiasco of 2001 – these firms are globally renown for creating value for their clients ("The lessons from Enron", 2002). A large part of their success stems from the firm's ability to attract and retain skilled management professionals, who in turn are trained to approach, diagnose, and prescribe solutions to address their client's diverse problems. The other is the way these firms are structured to maximize their impact across the various industries they serve. Many firms operate off a matrix model, divided into either practice areas (like human capital, talent, strategy, digital) or industry (like financial services, retail or telecommunications) that allows the firm to channel the appropriate resources towards their client's problems. Underpinning this is a firm's people: numerous communities of practice composed of management

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professionals with the training, knowledge and expertise to deliver value to the firm's clients. Integral to this is how these functions within a firm come together for the benefit of a client, and revolves around how a client engagement might be initially structured. The structure of the solution that a firm may develop for a client problem - sometimes created by those tasked with delivering the solution or sometimes by dedicated sales staff, referred to as a solution architecture - will frame the client need and the ensuing engagement. This solution is often only as strong as the various components or resources this team has access to from within the firm, and may comprise of varying communities of practice built around a sector, industry, or for some firms a piece of technology. Accordingly, various client engagements are designed around leveraging certain functions within a firm, its own people, processes, or technologies, to capture and deliver value to its clients. This approach is laden with a firm's proprietary methodology - its value-chain as a way of doing business - that client teams might apply as a sequenced solution to a problem that leverages the core functions of a firm's resources.

This solution is ultimately made more impactful because of its inherent scalability. This capacity - to effectively scale a solution by taking one generated for client A and applying it to client B, regardless of industry - is the cornerstone of value creation and delivery for a large consulting firm. This ultimately perpetuates certain proven solution architectures, and reinforces the structures and functions within a given firm's value-chain. Critically, this scalable approach to capturing and delivering value is the critical differentiator

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from smaller consultancies with more bespoke offerings. Again, this is accomplished by leveraging a larger firm's robust matrix model, approach to packaging and delivering solutions, and its broad resource pool. While the clients may not be from the same sector or industry, nor may their problems be outrightly similar (in its definition or consequences), this approach allows the consulting firm to quickly take advantage of one solution, edit it, and apply it as a remedy for the benefit of others. This in turn brings benefits to the client, who is able to take advantage of this approach to leverage a proven solution provided by experts in the field (another selling asset the firms use) with relevant experience and knowledge concerning their business challenges. Consulting firms have harnessed and refined this capacity by building strong organizational learning practices within and across their firms and allowing these multinational firms to capitalize knowledge and institutionalize best practices across their networks (Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino 2008). Predictably, a culture of systemic efficiency and productivity tends to permeate a consulting firm through its every echelon and function; but it is this element that gives these firms their competitive edge and reinforces their value-chain (Pangaro, 2002). This element is the ability to harness resources and functions from across these larger firms permit them to attract clients whose challenges might stretch the capacity of smaller firms. This proficiency is so well established that in recent years, when the rapid pace and scale of change began rattling industry - many companies turned to consultants for solutions. Having evolved to be so much to so many, these large firms had unwittingly become leviathans in their own right, whose scalable solutions -



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once a long time asset - now became a liability. In the face of the contemporary winds of disruption, these firms and their solutions fell short on delivering the solutions their clients needed. Finding themselves ill equipped to cope, the large consulting firms turned to their periphery communities of practice, smaller boutique firms in their near abroad, and happened upon those with a focus on design and innovation consulting.

This brings us back to design thinking, though it is important to stress that when discussing the emergence of design and innovation firms, all would be for naught if it did not first outline that many of these smaller consultancies vary by design – no pun intended. Some like Doblin were pioneers in business model innovation stretching back to the early 1980s; others such as Lunar and IDEO would grow into the industry leads in the 90s and early 2000s for their product and service design based on more explicit human, or user-centred approaches. In the decades following, newer firms like AdaptivePath would become one of the leading digital user experience firms; while at Fjord, technology and service design would combine to create bespoke client-solutions (Kolko, 2015). Similar to how this researcher treated the large consulting firms (above), the focus of this paper is one the how versus the what. To put it another way, the focus of this paper is this bespoke element that is common across these firms and their value-chains regardless of what they do to outwardly manifest design thinking and its principles. These consultancies would build their value and business off creating tailored solutions to address their clients' problems. Attracting creative minds from

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across a number of disciplines, the firms excelled at leveraging the design thinking - the empathy, creativity, and rationality described earlier, and immerse it in business principles to create inspired and sometimes disruptive solutions. In tech hubs dotting the globe, design thinking would bring back-end proficiencies in engineering, technology and experience design, together with front-end business acumen, insight, strategic planning, and research. Much of this would combine to not only permit but also encourage a design and innovation firm to zigzag towards distinctly creative solutions for its clients.

While a consulting generates value to its clients through its ability to replicate and scale solutions across its client base, a design and innovation consultancy does the opposite. The focus instead is on tailoring solutions that address their clients' core needs - or business problem/challenge - that tend to scale ineffectively outside of that client. This reflects not only the contrasting demands of their respective industry: consulting firms traditionally served clients whose needs were remedied by a traditional slate of services, while design and innovation consultancies arose in this service periphery, accommodating the needs of clients with very specific (and often demanding) challenges. Moreover, underpinning design and innovation consultancies was the generative design thinking process described above, which ensured that these firms would likely diverge and converge around a reframed client problem as one means of defining a sustainable, possible solution (Brown, 2009). For example, the challenge of one client is not the same as those of

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another client, even if much might appear similar, the likelihood is that the design thinking process would generate untold nuances that may in turn impact the given solution, and any potential product, process or service. Therefore, a business problem that might arise for the first client could look outwardly similar to that of a second client, but their solutions – when generated by a design and innovation consultancy – will likely vary. Again, the design thinking process generates and delivers value by reframing problems and articulating solutions around a deep understanding of a problem, product, process, or service. It is upon this foundation that design and innovation consultancies have tackled their clients' problems and tended to create innovative solutions. As disruption has recently swept across many sectors and industries; accordingly, design thinking and the creative process it entails, came to act as a lighthouse would in a storm, guiding many wayward businesses as they sought to navigate this change. Doing this, design thinking helped many adapt the way they generate value through a nuanced understanding of their people – customers, employees, and clients – along with their processes, and technologies. This bespoke approach to capturing and delivering value helped make firms, like Doblin, IDEO, Lunar, Fjord, AdaptivePath - and others - household names across a rapidly evolving economy. This, as a result, made them fresh targets for acquisition by those larger consulting firms eager to fluff their sails and drive into the winds of change.

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With reference to the work of John Maeda, the rate of acquisitions in the design space has increased in recent years: in 2007, Doblin was acquired by Monitor, and later Deloitte in 2013; in 2013, Accenture invested in Fjord; in 2015 McKinsey bought LUNAR, in 2014 CaptialOne purchased AdaptivePath and most recently, the Kyu Collective bought into a large segment of the industry giant, IDEO; Capgemini acquired Fahrenheit 212; and Toronto's Idea Couture was purchased by Cognizant (Rhodes, 2016; Maeda, 2016; Vanhemert, 2015; Burgess, 2016). These acquisitions, and others like it listed below, are symptoms of a change that is compelling the consulting industry to pivot as a way to adapt to the increasing pace and scale of change. While this research will focus exclusively on how consulting firms are investing in design and innovation and the challenges surrounding the integration of their workforces, it is worth noting that this trend goes beyond the industry to include financial services, consumer retail, and communications, media and telecommunication (Maeda, 2016). Even governments are investing in design thinking as it pertains to their customers - citizens: the United States' Department of Veterans Affairs created the Veteran Experience Team inside its Center for Innovation; and the Government of Canada is investing in service design innovation across various departments, including the Privy Council (Kolko, 2015; "What we do - Privy Council Office", 2016). And while some corners have prophesied the end of design thinking - and the rise of 'big design' such as Robert Fabricant - or (the witty) Jules Ehrhardt who suggests that all of these acquisitions will result in their own undoing with the rise of new caste of digital agencies; this researcher sees these movements

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combine to underscore the core value of design thinking (Fabricant, 2014; Ehrhardt, 2016). Applying the empathetic, creative, and rational tenets of design thinking to complex problems improves client products, processes, and services; bolstering the capacity of these organizations to better capitalize on their own distinct value-chains.

These acquisitions not only benefit the consulting firms by providing them with a ready bolted-on capacity - or an additional function to include within their solution architectures - but also addresses a number of other challenges facing both the larger consulting firm and the smaller design and innovation consultancies. While many of the former had invested in building digital and analytics practices the might provide more information, clients grew to demand additional skill sets to give those numbers and insights deeper meaning. Enter design thinking and its creative process of designing and executing bespoke solutions for its clients. Concurrently, while design and innovation consultancies had excelled at generating these bespoke solutions for their clients; as it happened, these smaller firms had in recent years encountered limits to their growth. Tapping into the global networks that the global consulting firms had built (often through other acquisitions) grew increasingly appealing to the smaller bespoke firms. Both ultimately had something the other had – and out of the numerous announcements that would soon dot the landscape it became clear these acquisitions bolstered the competitive advantage that the other was striving to corner. Consulting firms gained the experience in design thinking (user, product, service, process, or

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otherwise), along with additional creative profile and cachet to attract top talent and new clients, while the design and innovation firm gained access to a global network of resources and a roster of potential new clients, along with a corresponding bump in the share in the profits of the firm. While those within and outside these firms can see the benefits to be reaped for the two firms to integrate their staff and their approaches - such as Fjord's John Oswald who succinctly puts the challenge of collaboration on its head by pointing out the many benefits to be reaped - there is nonetheless a tension (Oswald, 2016). Despite the best-laid plans to integrate workforces and realize the value of these investments, tensions manifest at client sites that reflect a deeper misalignment around their respective value-chains. This is the story of the bespoke approach of the design and innovation subunit, versus the scalable approach of the consulting firm, and the impact this has on integrating workforces.

While this industry-wide shift reflected the needs of both consulting firm and the design and innovation firms to adapt, these movements would in turn reveal certain tensions this researcher would observe through conversations. This recognizes that the way these firms are set up to capture and deliver value might exacerbate certain challenges associated with integrating workforces. With the two systems – the bespoke and the scalable – staring each other down, this researcher opted to go upstream to discern solutions, to define efficient tweaks that better align the value-chains and de-conflict some of the challenges downstream. Some of this will be explored in the next chapter, the

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methodology, which describes this researcher's interactions with individuals from both the primary line of business within a consulting firm along with their design and innovation units, and in following chapters discussing findings. Building off those initial conversations described in chapter one, it was clear to this researcher that further fieldwork - interviews - would provide the necessary insight for understanding and addressing the challenges around effectively integrating workforces. While later chapters will move into the third quadrant of the Analysis-Synthesis Bridge Model to explore the tactics around what could be - and how consulting firms might be able to better align their firms' and subunits' value-chains, let us first examine the next step in this journey.

### **Chapter Three - Methodology**

The approaches that consulting firms have taken to fold design and innovation units into their business models has varied: some have acquired firms outright while others have sought to organically build their own design and innovation units. For example, in contrast to the bolt-on model that Accenture has taken with Fjord, PwC recently launched their ‘built in-house’ Experience Centre that is staffed with designers of every background (Tadena, 2015). Another example of the latter approach is IBM, who recently undertook an effort to become the world’s largest design thinking firm by hiring thousands of design thinkers into roles across the global firm (Wilson, 2014). Regardless of path, these approaches have created certain tensions, which can be understood through the lens of misaligned value-chain models, which make integrating these workforces more challenging. To address the primary research question – how might consulting firms more effectively integrate their design and innovation units within their broader workforce - this researcher tried to both focus on the practical problems facing the certain firms while also generating a holistic understanding of the dynamic needs facing a consulting industry adapting to a rapidly changing environment. While a literature review provided an understanding of the discrepancy between a firm and its subunits value-chains, it became clear that fieldwork would be necessary if this researcher were to build the required insights to address the challenges of workforce integration.



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Again, achieving this depth required the blending of two components: 1) a literature review that revealed valuable context around the situation as it was; and 2) primary research - fieldwork - in the form of interviews to generate insight into the experiences of workforce integration across consulting firms and their design units. Combining these approaches, the literature review providing the background elements while the primary research added detail and depth – gave a clearer picture the author could use to generate a series of findings. These methods would in turn provide the base insight to create substantive findings that might address the challenges that consulting firms face when integrating newly acquired workforces. This will permit in the next chapter, recalling Figure 1 in chapter one, this project’s movement into the third quadrant to explore the model of what could be versus what previous chapters, including this one, aspire to do by building the as-is (Dubberly, Evenson, & Robinson, 2008). To add, this researcher saw this project going beyond the tensions described earlier to better understand the causes of the challenges that consulting firms appeared to be facing, and ultimately provide a remedy. To do this, this meant talking to people.

Before that, though, the author must first outline some of the considerations that formed the base of research for this study. At the time of writing this paper, new acquisitions are being announced monthly. One of the most thorough efforts to capture a snapshot of this trend and presenting it is John Maeda’s second annual Design in Tech Report. It chronicles the increasing

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pace of acquisition within of design and innovation firms (Maeda, 2016).

While studies like this - and other articles in circulation about what is happening - are informative, there is unfortunately very little information available about how well these integrations are being conducted. This is due to two factors: the first is that once the acquisition is announced, the matter of how well the design or innovation unit integrates into the business of a consulting firm becomes an internal matter. The lessons and insights that a firm generates are therefore proprietary and not generally shared with the public. While firms excel at self-promotion to build business among its clients - so if you ask anyone officially, there are no droids - this researcher has gathered from colleagues that many of these firms are taking stock of their recent acquisitions to learn and grow. The second factor is that consulting firms, while behemoths, can resemble a multi-headed hydra. The problems facing an office in one firm will differ among others within the same firm, and so on. Scaling a solution - ironically something that these firms excel at doing externally - therefore becomes problematic within a firm, regardless of the name on the building. Compounding this, as an external observer, is the absence of official information and therefore official clarity on how well design and innovation units are being integrated within these consulting firms. This research and the approaches this researcher chose to use intend to address this gap by generating insight into the first-hand experiences of an evolving industry in a rapidly changing ecosystem.

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Addressing this gap – of information concerning the internal integration of these acquisitions - involved a number of challenges that would highlight how this research was dependant upon an ability to tap into first hand knowledge of the industry. While the texts reviewed in the previous literature review did much to set the tone and provide a sense of depth to the analysis, the majority of the observations are snapshots of a landscape that even a few months later look far different. Ultimately, this literature review had the effect of focussing and informing elements of the primary research that would be conducted later, shaping many of the questions asked later in the interview process.

The literature sampled looked at articles from academic journals, relevant periodicals and contemporary publications – since this was aiming to be a current ‘snapshot’. Because the research on patterns and events that took place in the last half decade, the literature review accordingly scoped around a tighter date range, with most of the articles having been written in the last decade. The literature review was not only useful in forming the foundation of the primary research phase, but also in unbundling the topic to provide the researcher with a more resounding appreciation of the tensions around integrating workforces by constructing a model that might better inform how to further tackle this project’s research question.

The next phase of this research involved primary data gathering techniques – semi-structured interviews – that would generate the required insight into the experiences across consulting firms and their design units. These interviews

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would not only add a layer to the understanding overtop the literature review, but would also help to differentiate this project by tapping directly into consulting firms and its people. To accomplish this demanded a level of discretion: working with firms and their employees required that interviews were confidential. Not only that, care was taken to ensure confidentiality: various consulting firms were involved with this research so any firm-specific references were sanitized from the findings. This included references to clients, recent projects, office locations, and methodologies, functions or specialties that are specific or distinct to certain firms. These firms and their people were located in the Greater Toronto Area, and were selected for this research by soliciting the researchers professional network. Sometimes this involved finding an internal champion who helped to bring fellow employees aboard, or sometimes it involved speaking with former employees first hand experience of the acquisitions. This research was less interested in any one firm and their proprietary approach and more concentrated on generating as broad an understanding possible of the challenge at hand. This being: understanding how consulting firms might more effectively integrate their design and innovation units within their broader workforce.

In order to obtain these insights, this research engaged a number of professional services firms that had invested in design and innovation. This was important because this research sought to collect insights from the recent experiences of those firms and their employees. Working with internal champions at these firms, this research engaged volunteers within the primary

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business unit (consulting) and its sub-unit (in design and innovation) to participate in an interview. The goal of the interviews sought to identify insights around their experiences in working within the firm, specifically to understand how consulting firms had integrated their design and innovation units within their lines of business, and what, if any lessons they might share from this experience. As described above, the questions for the interviews were informed by the literature review, and crafted with the intent of eliciting insight into both the opportunities and challenges surrounding the design-driven acquisitions. Ethically, there were risks around coercion given the use of internal champions to assist with securing interviews; with some participants potentially feeling obliged to participate. Cognizant of this, the researcher sought to be explicit about the consequences (or the distinct lack thereof) around supporting this project.

On sample size, the interviews included ten participants from four firms and were conducted in June and July of 2016. Two of the participants had formerly worked in consulting roles with exposure to design and innovation units but were now retired, while the remainder currently work in consulting firms that recently acquired or invested in design and innovation units themselves.

Among the remainder, three were located in design and innovation units, three were in primary line of business - management consultants - and two had roles that mixed the two, design and innovation with management consulting.

Further, four were women and six were males, while every role within a firm's totem was represented - from associate or equivalent through to partner or

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equivalent. The interview was structured in such a way as to engage those with the perspective of, and exposure to, core and subsidiary business processes and structures. Built as a 45 minutes semi-structured interview, this permitted this researcher to chat with participants for as much as 60 minutes (in a couple circumstances) or as briefly as 30 minutes, allowing for fascinating and surprisingly candid conversations on professional experiences and personal stories of frustration, pain, or humour. While the intention had been to engage more participants, the scope of this project was actually more manageable as a result of the limited participants. In reflection, the research might have benefitted from greater runway, more months, which may have potentially yielded a greater number of participating firms and therefore number of participants and data. However, the reality is that weaving the findings from participants into what the literature review provided was enough of a challenge; at numerous points throughout the project the temptation to expand the scope necessitated a conservative reminder of the intent and scale of the original research question.

The original scope of the research included a survey, to be conducted before the interview, that centred on a participant's values vis-à-vis design thinking, innovation, and consulting. Recall that both management consultants and members of the design and innovation units were slated to participate, hence the desire to understand how they valued each other. However, despite the initial enthusiasm that this researcher received from possible participants, this technique had to be cancelled due to poor uptake. This may have been for a

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number of reasons. The most likely cause is time, although risk may have also been a factor. While every step was taken to ensure confidentiality, participating in the survey (and even the interview, which proved more difficult to execute) may have been too much for some individuals.

Participating in a research project aimed at revealing certain challenges within their workplace may have proven too risky. Despite the assurances of confidentiality, possible participants may have been sufficiently hesitant about the process and potential outcomes to prevent them from participating in both the survey and the interview. Combine this with time - this research was conducted over a few months over the summer of 2016 when many potential participants were likely on vacation or otherwise engaged. Additionally, attempting to find time with consultants who are often on projects sometimes in other cities throughout their workweeks was challenging. This resulted in many interviews being rescheduled and/or in the case of the survey, completely scrapped. Had there been more time, perhaps an additional four to six months, the scope and scale of this research might have been sufficiently expanded to exercise the original research design and protocol. Indeed, the research question itself went through a few different iterations as well, and had it not been for the tighter scope and scale of this project this paper may have ended up reading more like a Tolstoy novel.

As a result, this paper's approach sought to hone in on the research question to generate insight to understand those tensions, described in chapter one, around workforce integration. This involved focussing on the individual's experience

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of the integration, which would in turn provide context into how consulting firms are integrating their design and innovation units within their workforces. This researcher had established in previous conversations with consultants (those part of the primary line of business within a firm as well as the design and innovation unit) that there were tensions as a result of the integration of workforces. Meanwhile the literature informed the researcher that industry-wide movements (acquisitions in design thinking) had revealed critical discrepancies between the value-chains of a consulting firm (scalable) and their design and innovation unit (bespoke). In due course, the fieldwork - the interviews - allowed this researcher to dig down into the experience of workforce integration across these firms by evaluating the insights of various participants. The semi-structured interview in turn allowed for conversations on dynamics that were hardly explored in the literature review. These dynamics, like the backgrounds and attitudes of certain employees swept up in the acquisitions, would inform an exploration of ways to address the misalignment of value-chains that in turn build into recommendations that confront this project's research question: how might consulting firms might more effectively integrate their design and innovation units within their broader workforce? Building off the knowledge cultivated by the interviews - and cemented in the literature review - the research methods paved the way for report to move into the final quadrant of the Analysis-Synthesis Bridge Model, and define recommendations that may provide suggestions around what might be done better integrate workforces.



### **Chapter Four - Findings**

Over the course of two months in the summer of 2016, this researcher conducted ten interviews with members of a consulting firm's primary line of business, management consultants, and their design and innovation units. The goal of these interviews was to derive insight from those with first-hand experience of the integration of design and innovation units within the broader workforce of the consulting firm. For this researcher, the question this paper sought to address: how consulting firms might better effectively integrate their design and innovation units within their broader workforce? was shaped by conversations prior to this project with colleagues in consulting who suggested there were issues within their firms, described in Chapter One as tensions. These tensions were underpinned by a marked sense of distrust in the workplace, lack of confidence within client facing teams, and downright frustration among colleagues who seemingly failed to understand both what one and other did and might provide the other by way of value. This would in turn manifest as challenges at client-sites, misunderstandings with new colleagues, and general misalignment around how the new teams might best work together. Further informed by a literature review that pointed towards a misalignment of value-chains, this research project was built around a desire to understand these tensions in greater detail. To address this, the researcher conducted fieldwork to generate insights from which to distil a set of recommendations addressing the research question. While previous chapters

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described this journey, this chapter will explore the outcome - the recommendations.

The participant interviews provided this researcher with a lot of information to sift through, with insights ranging from commentary on leadership, recruitment, training and hiring programs, along with existential reflections on the role of design thinking within larger firms. These conversations, sometimes cathartic for the participants, gave this researcher the fodder to diverge around the research question, which at that point was evolving, and ultimately converge around a series of insights that, when grouped together, provided the potential for defining a set of recommendations. For the purpose of generating these recommendations and recalling the original tensions around workforce integration, this researcher drew a line around certain insights as a way to maintain a tighter scope. Certain items were simply outside the scope of this project, such as tackling a firm's leadership paradigms and power structures, which resulted in them being struck from this paper's focus. This is not to take away from their overall impact on workforce integration; rather, it instead recognizes the practical and immediate scope of limitations for a major research project like this. Moreover, many of these elements were a bridge too far for this researcher, who – when inquiring after more information around these elements – would often be left in the lurch since the researcher was an outsider. Many of these factors were too sensitive – too proprietary – to share outside of the firm itself. What was left would ultimately be useful in its own right, since it followed that generalist

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perspective that this researcher sought to discern more vividly. As a result, the project would take the many pieces of information collected through the research and bucket them into three distinct, yet complementary categories that impact workforce integrations: education, training, and attitude. First, this researcher selected and defined these buckets because they appeared to have the most direct impact on the tensions around workforce integration, as revealed in large part by the participants themselves. Secondly, they also provided the best means with which to approach the research question within the scope of this project – around de-conflicting the tensions within integrations. This also recognizes that these elements - education, training, and attitude – play a unique and influential role in shaping the ability and willingness of workforces to adapt to change. This acknowledges and appreciates that people – like those who participated in this research – are shaped by these elements: by the education they receive (or not), the training from which they benefit (or not), and the positive attitude they exude within the workplace (or not); and these elements in turn impact the way these integrations unfold. These are the ties that bind and why these three buckets were selected, and ultimately why the recommendations described below stack off one and other with such effect. This logic was further informed by ideas addressing collective innovation in the workplace, specifically understanding what made people more willing and able of innovating (Hill, Brandeau, Truelove, & Lineback, 2014). As alluded above, when looking at these buckets this researcher believes that education and training can address the obstacles around willingness, for example fostering a sense of collective

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purpose or community; while attitude might address obstacles around the friction that may result in improved sharing of ideas, which in turn may foster resilience, agility, and capacity within these workforces to adapt to changes – like integrating workforces. This impact on creating more resilient workforces able to cope with workforce integration, by focussing on the impact of each bucket has on work force integration by articulating recommendations that can stack, is what propels this approach forward. As Linda Hill stacks these elements to act as a mutually reinforcing collective, rendering the insights into buckets accomplishes something similar: solutions addressing one element are likely to impact others, and vice versa. The application of this logic resulted in the creation of these buckets, as a way to more effectively identify a set of recommendations that might have the best overall impact.

Broadly, this researcher sought to house this project within a design thinking process that used “empathy for the context of the problem, creativity in the generation of insights and solutions, and rationality to analyze and fit solutions to context” through every stage of the research (Lanahan, 2012). The research project as a whole reflects this, and practically saw this researcher close with the problem at hand (empathy), examine upstream solutions to address the value-chain friction causing immediate tensions downstream (creativity), and identify pragmatic steps that consulting firms might take (rationality). While this projects scope did not permit room for a direct application of d.Schools close-knit design thinking loop (more on that in the conclusion though), there were other models that provided guidance to this researcher’s efforts. As

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outlined in previous chapters, none were applied more clearly as the abridged Analysis-Synthesis Bridge Model. Throughout this research journey, this model proved to be a valuable tool to define this project as an exercise in design thinking itself (Dubberly, Evenson, & Robinson, 2008). This project was built around its stepped-approach to describing the existing situation (conversations in chapter one) and with abstractions of the current model (value chains in chapter two). While the following chapter is the exercise in synthesis - of constructing a model of what could be - by generating a set of recommendations - this project admittedly stops short of full out forecasting. This effort nonetheless allowed for the casting of a future by exploring the recommendations provided in looking at a what if – what if certain recommendations were implemented and what would that consulting firm (and its design and innovation unit) look like in the future? This was the choice of this researcher, recalling the scoping described above, who instead opted to describe what could be through the lens of the last chapter, the conclusion, and its recommendations for further research. Nevertheless, the role of explicit modelling in framing the challenges surrounding the inherently complex task of integrating workforces was useful. Driving through the models available to this researcher, this project reflected the fluid manner in which information assembled from various inputs - conversations, literature review, and fieldwork - can migrate through a model and be distilled into a series of outputs - findings and recommendations - to form actionable and mutually reinforcing recommendations around addressing a distinct problem.

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This filtering method allowed, in time, for the bucketed insights to be refined further into the creation of a set of similarly bucketed recommendations. As with the original categories, each recommendation sought to positively reinforce the others. This researcher believes that this stacking of recommendations, or bucket logic, may serve to address the supporting question underpinning this research project: how to align a divergent value-chain? Doing this with any degree of success - couching the bespoke within the scalable - is what, in turn, might allow for the better integration of these workforces and therefore address this project's ultimate aim. This approach recognizes that the scalable approach of the consulting firm is currently the predominant force behind the way a firm of that size generates revenue. While the bespoke is the potent force within the design and innovation unit, its capacity to usurp the existing approach to generating value within the broader consulting firm is limited. This is not to underwrite the value it brings – for it is great! However, the latter must, for the time being, adapt to the current system in order to flourish. Learning to play within this space – facilitated by better training programs, education supports, and attitude – can and will have an impact on how this value-chain alignment might unfold. For example, this is not to rule out the evolution of the former to perhaps mirror that of the latter – something to explore a bit more below. Ultimately, this couching reflects the reality of the world as-is, and provides a possible opportunity around the world to-be, by aligning value-chains that now stand opposite to one and other.

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These insights in turn generated a series of recommendations that the researcher realised had relevance not only to consulting firms, but in this case, academic programs and recent graduates as well. The decision to include multiple benefactors recognizes that these elements play vital roles as points of intervention within an integration, shaping how the process may ultimately unfold within a consulting firm. For example, to address education issues, consulting firms can do certain things better to equip its workforce with the knowledge they require. However, it would be neglectful to not recognize the role of academic programs in shaping workforces. This approach acknowledges that issues arising downstream are shaped by certain elements upstream. Therefore, applying a set of recommendations aimed at these points of interventions - looking at how to align value-chains - might serve to target the integration of workforces, and thus addresses the research question at the heart of this project: how might consulting firms more effectively integrate their design and innovation units within their broader workforce?

### **Finding 1 – Education**

Sitting down with one research participant, they revealed that some members of the design and innovation unit at the firm were the ‘*most educated but least experienced*’ individuals they had ever seen. This statement, shared by someone from within their firms’ design and innovation unit but whose sentiment others also shared, speaks to the lack of practical and theoretical business education that many graduates of design and innovation-centric programs possess upon entry into the workforce. This is an issue because a

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lack of business education hampers the ability for that individual to work within a workplace that values an understanding of business. This recognizes that consulting firms value an understanding of business, as it is one of the primary notions that underpin their approach to generating value – value for their own firm and for their clients. Understanding business (its practice, theory, and applications) is therefore very important for anyone joining that firm. Failure to do so will result in tensions – challenges – like the ones described earlier but also in the sentence provided above. Many consultants plainly scratch their heads when looking at designers, whom they view with “fascination and frustration”, as another consultant described it. This can lead to workplace challenges, for example, when a team of consultants and designers are working for a client, and the perception is that designers cannot perform tasks within a workplace that conform to a basic standard within that team. This will negatively impact consultants’ views of designers and creates an operational barrier between the two groups, which further exacerbates their capacity to work together. Why? Because this can bubble into resentment - as one management consultant mentioned, “They don’t even bother to understand how we do business (...)”. Understandably, not everyone who enters a workforce has all the experience required, but one way to circumvent this is through education. For example, business degrees, such as a Masters of Business Administration, will arm its students with the ability to function and thrive in business environments. Logically, design and innovation programs prepare its graduates to operate in design and innovation friendly environments. However, between the increasing popularity of design thinking



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in business, combined with the series of acquisitions within the industry, the likelihood increases that one might very well work in business even if they are a recent graduate of a design and innovation program. If this is a function of the new economy, or a general reaffirmation of capitalism, the take-away is nonetheless the same – it is therefore necessary for graduates of these programs to have a better understanding of - and experience with – the business practices that act as a lynchpin to this contemporary economy.

**So what: Consulting firms must provide better business education opportunities for their employees; and academic programs in design and innovation should incorporate more business education into their program structure.**

Providing increases experience - hands-on and theoretical - to members of the design and innovation unit will increase their capacity to integrate on client-projects, and increase their residual capacity as workforce resources within the firm. This means if a new hire into the design and innovation unit lacks some of these skills (because they bring other valuable experiences, for example), it is incumbent upon the consulting firm to provide them with the additional education. Workplace education programs or lunch and learns for these new members of the team is one way to increase awareness and understanding of business principles in the workplace. Another opportunity here is to create a mentorship program within the firms for new design and innovation unit members, to be paired with senior consultants who are interested in sharing

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their knowledge and experience of business with these newer staff members. This would foster a hands-on, practical exchange of knowledge versus more instructional learning, which may be of interest to those joining the firm. Now the second element of this recommendation, as it is applied to academic programs, does not advocate compromising on the elements that make those academic programs valuable; rather, the research suggests that these programs might better prepare its graduates if more business were built into their curriculums. This might include more business courses, internship opportunities, or corporate partnerships with local enterprises that afford opportunities for those students who aspire to work within business environments to gain the exposure they might require to succeed. Equally, the onus also lies on the consulting firm to provide education opportunities for their staff to ensure every member of their organization has access to the best information, and opportunities, for their professional development. Not every member of a consulting firm will have an MBA background, but if the firm values business acumen in their employees it is therefore incumbent upon the firm to provide such opportunities for professional development; this also extends to how a firm might hire. If for example, an understanding of the basic business principles that drive their organizations is important, then it hiring candidates with those backgrounds (and representing a diversity of experience) should be weighed equal to their knowledge of design. Concurrently, academic programs can take this one step today to better prepare their graduates for their futures in business. Moreover, this will create more dynamic and resilient graduates who will be better prepared to adjust and thrive in today's rapidly

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evolving economy. Finally, using education as a lever, this step is intended to bring about greater alignment of value-chains by bridging the apparent disconnect between certain parts of the workforce, with the broader workplace. For more on how that broader workplace can take its own steps, let us continue exploring the findings below.

### **Finding 2 – Attitude**

Before getting to that, there is another conversation that stood out to this researcher and it involved one management consultant who share an exchange they had with a member of a design and innovation unit working on a client-project, which roughly followed:

Consultant: We're going to the client site today, you will need to wear business attire

Designer: Never! You're such a corporate sell out, you're a hack!

This quote reflects a longer conversation among the team, which would later see the consultant fire the designer from the project because they refused to play by the same rules of the team. Recognizing the unique value that the designer brought to the project, the consultant had taken efforts to accommodate, but the attitude of the designer ultimately resulted in them being rolled off the project. As a consultant in a similar position to the one mentioned above, noted: "if they couldn't be a team player, they were off the team". Unfortunately, this sentiment was shared more widely than anticipated across all participants, and was even confirmed by designers who described

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some of this tension and their obstinacy, with pride. One innovation consultant reflected that they were “the only one who got it”, it being the problem that their clients possessed and implying that their colleagues (management consultants) therefore did not. It is with a level of irony that this finding requires exploring, considering the degree of empathy frequently used by design thinkers to create innovative solutions. Nonetheless, such sentiments - shared by consultants as obtuse observations and designers as prideful reflections - suggest that holding empathy for others may not always extend to colleagues within their workplace. Granted these individuals may not have felt adequately supported in their own needs at that time at the client site or elsewhere within their day-to-day, it is nonetheless important for them to package their emotions in a manner more conducive to building cohesion and trust. While storming and norming are critical steps of team-based work cycles, non-constructive statements such as the ones shared above may well do more to isolate designers and innovators in the long run. The nature of such statements – which in this researcher’s experience is a viewpoint commonly shared within certain degree programs that are fond of criticising mainstream business values – can have a lasting detrimental impact upon a workplace by impacting the trust that is integral in building cohesive teams - not to mention insulting those colleagues steeped in traditional business values. This fosters mistrust and only advances misunderstanding, driving wedges between teams and the people that compose them. Recalling the work of Patrick Lencioni on the five critical dysfunctions of a team, the absence of trust that these statements engender, not to mention a lack of commitment that it signals more

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broadly, can have tremendous impact on the integration of teams and workforces (Lencioni, 2006). Namely, the teams will break down without these critical bonds in place, and if these teams break down then they fail to deliver value, and if they fail to deliver value then their utility can be questioned, and if their utility is questioned then broader steps may be taken to jettison such investments that clearly failed to gel within the broader workforce. Moreover, even if in isolation, such divisive statements may have negative unintended consequences for the entire design and innovation unit within a consulting firm. Impressions can be made in a moment, but the perceptions they create can take far more time to reverse; and so in a firm when a consultant hears these types of comment emanating from their new colleagues, chances are they will not soon forget it. Nor will they bother in their own right to build bridges of understanding with these colleagues if they only believe their efforts will be met with flames. To build more collaborative, integrated, teams, both sides must take steps (and advantage of opportunities) to redress the tensions that currently divide them.

**So what: consulting firms should provide more opportunities for their teams to collaborate and learn from one another before being placed in client-facing roles.**

Increasing exposure between consultants and designers will increase the capacity for these two groups to work together. Increasing these touch points - whether it's participating in practice groups, building client engagements, or

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even social calls outside of work hours - increases the possibility of collaboration before going to the client site that in turn will likely reduce potential friction. While it's impossible to rehearse client engagements, perhaps running hybrid teams through practical cases will open a window of self-realization for all members of a team to better understand what each others value might be. Some of this will likely remind team members that everyone is valuable on the team and plays a unique, dynamic role within an engagement, whether they are a management consultant or a design thinker. Doing this through a mock case might also reveal a path for better resource utilization – identifying, and possibly capitalizing, on ways to integrate design thinking into the consultant's tool bag when looking to generate more innovative solutions for their clients. This in turn may help design thinkers be used more effectively within a firm's existing – scalable – value-chain. Creating these touch points – institutionalizing firm-wide mock internal case competitions to put hybrid teams through their paces – might build greater appreciation for one another's value to their clients (aligning their value-chains that currently stand apart) may in turn lead to the possible integration of design and innovation unit members on the creation of a client engagement will ensure the designers are more effectively employed, and less prone to expressions of dire frustration (which may also be a cause of such attitudinal outbursts). Returning to that, it is important to recall that even if teammates might share different educational or professional backgrounds, viewpoints, opinions, or even demands – they are no less valid than those within the design and innovation unit. Effective working relationships require trust, and where

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previous working experiences are lacking, a workaround is not through the use of targeted malice (Lencioni, 2006). Storm and norm, yes; but throwing mud will only isolate the design and innovation unit within or among the broader team. De-conflicting the work space by building more opportunities for collaboration may relieve several potential friction points, such as better utilizing design thinkers by incorporating them in designing a client engagement, and may also help the firm address issues more effectively before any effects are realised on a project downstream. This could in turn lead to the building of more effective, cohesive teams of designers and consultants who are better able to tap into their collective experiences and ultimately deliver greater value to clients. To accomplish this, however, some of the biases against business that designers have been known to share must be addressed. In conversations with this researcher, designers described consultants as “corporate yes-men” (even if they were women), “generally wicked people out to make money”, or vilified capitalism as a “system of evils”; all of this combines to show a disdain for their new colleagues. This might be remedied by incorporating more business education in their academic program, or in exposure to business environments before joining a firm. Ultimately, this researcher believes this might also be addressed head-on by encouraging individuals (specifically, recent graduates) to exercise more empathy with their colleagues in the workplace and not solely at client’s problems. Building channels to foster this empathy – like those case competitions described above which might in time turn into design jams, and other design-friendly models of collaboration – is a possible first step. This will build that mutual, two-way,

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valuing that in turn might allow for the better nesting of different value-chains since better understanding of one and others value and potential may lead to less overt friction on a team. Avoiding such outbursts through encouraged collaboration within the workplace will in and of itself help to relieve some of the tensions around workforce integrations and the ensuing challenges of reconciling disparate value-chains.

### **Finding 3 – Training**

As mentioned in previous chapters, the acquisition of design and innovation units by professional services firms has added more contemporary elements into the mix of doing business today. Like other sectors, a firm attracts and competes for human capital by shedding what is now considered stale but was once mandatory, things like suits and traditional office spaces. The idea is that to compete with new, more innovative companies, the firms must adapt or risk losing in the ongoing talent war. While this section will not debate the merits of open offices or the utility of ties; it will focus in a couple key elements that foster a better-integrated, collective workplace culture. For example, in the rush to welcome this new batch of design and innovation-centric staff, many firms have done away with mandated new hire training - a common theme across those interviewed and whose impact can be seen above. Why were these decisions made? No one interviewed could pinpoint a reason, nor was there any information released publically concerning this decision. Regardless, the consequences of foregoing such training are important. This is because mandated new hire training - for anyone who is new to the firm regardless of



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background and level of experience - provides those joining a firm with a grounding in the history, culture, and approaches that comprise a firm. Undergoing this training, a form of inculcation, is important for staff joining an organization whose population can be counted in the tens of thousands. When they forego the training and are instead incorporated directly into business teams that still wear suits and work within client-facing roles, tensions arise. One management consultant described feeling frustration and a sense of loss for the new-joiners: “they don’t have to go do mandatory hiring, which doesn’t make any sense since that’s where our teams are built; but they also miss out on so much. Going away [...] is so much fun! You make friends that will last your career no matter where you end up.” Again, since many firms have foregone the mandatory training they may not have been exposed to learning about how the broader firm conducts business – generate and capture value – instead they are given a hall pass to do business in ways that are unfamiliar to existing team members. The result has two impacts: for design and innovation consultants, they are given a different rulebook with which to operate. Some seem to know this and in extremis act with the impunity noted above. These may be outliers - not everyone reacts so negatively about going to a client-site - but they are nonetheless informative for the purpose of understanding how to better integrate workforces. Second, for consultants, there is a sense of misalignment within the firm when standards are unevenly enforced with sometimes little explanation. Another element that exacerbates this situation is that design and innovation units have been, according to many interviewed, poorly incorporated into the physical

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workplace. Across a number of firms these new units have either been given their own distinct spaces - often closed off to other employees - or appropriated space from existing employees. As one senior member of a consulting firm noted, “we made a room for them and filled it with them [designers], what more do they want from us?” Again, this causes two issues: for consultants there is a perception of design and innovation exclusivity that comes with the loss of work space for client teams and existing functions within the firm. Second, this cuts off design and innovation units from collaborating more effectively with their new colleagues. These steps, even if carefully thought through at higher levels of the firm, are often misunderstood at lower levels of the organization. No one understands why the new staff show up to work in “overalls and ugly sweaters” when in reality, this is part of a carefully crafted integration approach to allow that subunit to retain its identity and sense of community within what it might understand to be a borg-like culture that tends to assimilate all. Rather, maintaining such vestiges of sub-culture identity is pegged as much to that units way of delivering value as it is about fashion; outward representations in this sense are not intended to cause frustration – although that is what unfortunately happens. All that might be seen by management consultants is new hires “skipping mandatory training” or losing workstations to new staff that close their doors to “play with their Macbooks while we haven’t gotten a device upgrade in years.” Again, this may sound trivial, but it has a direct impact on the way these workforces are integrated. For example, when teams of consultants work with designers and show themselves unable to collaborate for a client, this

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compromises that teams' as well as the firm's capacity to deliver value. Lack of understanding, communication, and trust around why certain actions have been taken (or not, especially when it comes to non-mandatory workplace training) obstructs the capacity for these teams to ultimately collaborate on client-facing projects. Some of the solutions proffered below may seem rudimentary in their simplicity, but this does not take away from their necessity or their capacity to portend broader, more dynamic shifts.

**So what: First, consulting firms should make *new-to-the-firm* training programs mandatory for all hires, including incoming design and innovation unit employees.**

As with other staff segments, investing time and energy into training incoming staff and new hires about the way the firm does business pays off when they are on their first client engagement. Regardless of background - whether experienced hire or fresh out of an academic program - this type of training is vital to bridging the individual with the collective team. Currently, most firms will put all *new-to-the-firm* hires through this training, regardless of experience or training, although they neglect to apply this to design and innovation unit employees. This needs to end - this training is a vital element that helps foster greater internal alignment within the organization and allows every member of a newly or rapidly integrating workforce recognize the inherent value of the organization and its parts. This goes for both the new hires along with the existing staff, the latter might especially appreciate that

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everyone has basic standards of training with regards to the core functioning of the firm. Moreover, this will help build bridges of understanding from the moment someone joins a firm, collective training provides an opportunity for all those with an open mind (see attitude, above) to benefit from building bonds and connections with others, many of which may be used to foster collaboration on client-facing projects later. Better understanding of people, fostered through these training opportunities, will lead to stronger, more cohesive teams better prepared to generate impact and provide value for their clients.

**Secondly, consulting firms should mandate that all staff learn about design thinking and its value to their client projects.**

Much of the tension that this paper deals with comes from a mutual misunderstanding. While design thinkers may stand to benefit from more business training or exposure, it is also incumbent upon consultants to better understand how to use design and innovation units to their maximum potential. This relates critically to the way solutions - recall the discussion around solution architectures and client engagements in chapter two - are created and then ultimately delivered. The problem here is that consultants, or sales staff, designing the client engagement may not completely understand how to best leverage their design and innovation units, and risk applying them as they would any other function at their disposal within the firm. Increasing awareness and appreciation through the delivery of design thinking training

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programs within the firm might help consultants address this in two ways. One, understanding design thinking principles might allow for better execution of a project by pre-emptively addressing some of the tensions that come from misunderstandings stemming from its generative approaches. Secondly, and more importantly, this may lead to consultants bringing design thinkers into the process of building a client engagement. Permitting the design thinking process to be integrated at the inception of the engagement may permit the process to benefit from the intrinsic value of design thinking - its generative solutioning - and thus brought out in the actual delivery of the solution. This will address the tendency, and potential for conflict, that stems from design thinkers recasting a solution that has already been provided them. Ultimately, this might provide the single biggest boon to addressing workforce integration issues since this aligns the potential of design thinking's contribution to generating value with the consulting firm's existing approach to capturing value.

**To cement these efforts, consulting firms should also stop segregating their existing staff and their design and innovation units.**

As described above, this causes tensions and challenges for both consultants and designers, frustrating their capacity to integrate and work together as teams on behalf of clients. Open concept offices where all employees benefit from new workplace concepts are one thing, but placing all design and innovation-centric staff into one area and closing it off to others does little to

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foster collaboration among the broader workforce. This also reduces the opportunity for cross-functional learning within the firm and encourages consultants to only use design and innovation as resources, where in fact they might provide broader advantage (through their education and background) to the firm if the two were woven together more integrally a team. The potential impact of design and innovation on business is known to be great – getting people in the same room working together from the same playbook will foster a workplace that is integrated and aligned to generating that impact. Giving the opportunity to the design and innovation unit to lead the redesign of these co-working spaces may provide the most potent opportunity yet to allow the value of that subunit to shine through for the benefit of others within the firm.

Integrating the design and innovation unit into the solutioning – similar to the way they ought to be integrated within the solutioning for clients to better define their roles within the engagement – provides an opportunity to shape an outcome for the benefit not only of the subunit but for the entire firm. This might in turn lead to new opportunities for the design and innovation unit to use this capacity – to recreate spaces – for the benefit of clients who have also struggled through integrations.

**And finally, consulting firms should focus on improving their internal communications programs and their overall impact.**

From conversations with those interviewed, one issue that came up time and time again was the issue of insufficient communications. This appears to

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exacerbate many of the issues described in this paper, as those interviewed highlighted challenges around fully understanding the reasoning behind certain key decisions - for example, about physical workplaces or workforce training or education programs. Improving internal communications can foster increased buy-in from all levels of the organization and perhaps relieve some of the friction within and across teams. This appears to be a challenge in and of itself within the primary branch of a consulting firm, but is especially acute when adding institutional layers, such as recently acquired sub-units within a firm. Improving communications within and across a firm therefore stands to benefit both workforces within the integration by ensuring the passage of information, both about what has, or is, or will happen, to better inform employees across the company. How this recommendation may manifest will vary and may include hosting town-hall style meetings, increasing the capacity of leadership to engage the workforce with timely and accurate information, or providing more opportunities for the workforce to engage senior leadership in discussions concerning decisions that impact the firm. Another option, similar to the above, is to allow the design and innovation unit to help design part of the solution by applying design thinking principles – the generative DT cycle – to reframing the problem to better understanding the challenge and ultimately converge around a series of possible solutions. This iterative approach might in turn allow for the articulation of possible communication pathways not mentioned above, but instead created in a tailored way to address the functional gaps that this research has highlighted. These steps, taken in concurrence and tailored to the respective firms, might ultimately generate

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increasing levels of understanding, awareness, and collaboration within the firm and its subunits. The provision of more information, delivered more effectively and in a timelier manner will in theory, will serve to address head-on the friction, the misunderstanding, the frustration, and the anger that currently inhibits effective collaboration across client-facing teams.

### **So, so what?**

These recommendations are not to be applied one in isolation, although they could be however their effect on improving workforce integration by aligning value-chains might be constrained. As discussed above, their application through stacking improves their overall capacity to generate impact – packaging these recommendations in a broader implementation package may in turn be the best approach to pilot these findings. Any attempt to pilot, however, must ensure the application and exercise of design thinking principles in the field. Practically, this means – and recognizes- that the recommendations will take different shapes and forms depending on the firm, its offices, and their locations. Ultimately, the solutions, to be sustainable, need to be created around the needs of their workforces and the specific problems that may be unique to each firm. The ability to create empathetic, creative, and ultimately rational solutions through the application of design thinking's generative and wholly iterative approach hinges upon constructing a profound understanding of the problem as it is, and reimagining solutions around what could be, then drawing lines of best fit between the two. This is where, ultimately, the greatest potential lies – to channel, enable, and empower the



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design and innovation units within these firms to take a lead role in designing their own solutions, to effectively solve for their own integration challenge. Doing this will create tailored solutions that fit the unique challenges that might exist within and across these consulting firms who have recently acquired design and innovation units. These solutions may vary, and their ability to pilot from one office to another might result in dramatic changes and adaptations that in turn will allow the solution to become even more sustainable. However, peeling from previous sections, some solutions might see design and innovation units become part of the solution architecture, designing their client engagement and ensuring that their teams are integrated and used to the maximum effect. Giving the design and innovation unit greater autonomy may in turn allow it to define its roles within and across the firm in ways previously unimagined. For example, while the approach in this paper has been to focus on couching the bespoke approach within the scalable, the future may cast a light on a path that will see the scalable come to resemble the bespoke. This may be the result of external factors – new ways of doing business and what consumers and clients might value – but this may also be driven by internal successes. The ascendance of design thinking in business heralds an opportunity to shift the paradigm of how business can be conducted, and consulting firms may prove to become the most dynamic vector to see this shift propagate across the new economy. Aligning the value-chains of one firm with another may ultimately result in a transformation that will see new challenges. However, the steps outlined above have the ability to compensate for that, by building opportunities for collaboration and learning

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that goes both ways. Building on this approach in a pilot project described above may disentangle the tensions that currently create the frustration and anger that currently seems to plague these workforces. Going into this dynamic problem with the design thinking process by ones side, the prospect of breaking apart the challenges that workforce integrations create and deciphering sustainable solutions is within the grasp of these consulting firms. They need only to look inside – and upstream – to better understand how they may navigate the challenges around integrating their workforces.

To recap, these recommendations are intended to be practical in their potential implementation, and built from the insights that this researcher gleaned from interviews with members of various consulting firm’s primary line of business, management consultants, and their design and innovation units. This chapter cast this fieldwork against a backdrop informed by a literature review, which pointed out the misalignment of value-chains as a possible challenge around integrating these workforces. Recalling the original tensions, these interviews helped to generate a set of insights that this researcher then took and passed them through an abridged version of the Analysis-Synthesis Bridge Model (Dubberly, Evenson, & Robinson, 2008). Doing this allowed for the distillation of the findings into recommendations, effectively weaving the researcher from a view of the situation as is, towards a model of what could be, to generate possible solutions. The motivation through this process - influenced itself by design thinking - revolved around a desire to better integrate the workforces of a consulting firm and its recently acquired design

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and innovation unit. To generate a set of recommendations, this paper and this chapter in particular looked upstream from the tensions that manifested between the recently integrating workforces. This perspective in turn would permit this researcher to look at these recommendations as a way to pinpoint and target certain points of intervention aimed at relieving these tensions by better aligning a consulting firm's value-chain with that of its design and innovation unit. This involves couching the bespoke within the scalable, and throughout this paper is identified as a means of revealing a path to better workforce integration. Why? This approach recognizes that the scalable is the predominant force and the way of doing business today, while the bespoke is the rising force. As a result the latter must, for the time being, learn to play by the others' rules if it is to flourish. This is not to rule out the evolution of the former to perhaps mirror that of the latter – as described above, it is possible! - but this couching in the present reflects the reality of the world as-is, and provides the best way to align value-chains as they stand opposite to one and other. Echoing the words of the first chapter, the research question this paper asks aimed to provide a way forward for consulting firms to better integrate their workforces by identifying possible leverage around points of interventions within the integration journey. This chapter is a way forward - among many - informed by the rich insights shared by those with intimate experience of the workforce integrations. In the next chapter, we will recap these recommendations that these insights inspired and look at the next steps for this research.

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### **Chapter Five - Conclusion**

This research paper begins and ends with a sincere and pragmatic question – how might consulting firms more effectively integrate their design and innovation units within their broader workforce? This researcher embarked upon this course of research, interested not only in their job prospects, but also in generating an outcome - a series of recommendations - that might relieve some of the tensions around workforce integration. These tensions, described to this researcher by those within the design and innovation units and by consultants within the primary line of business of the firm, led the researcher to ultimately believe that the challenge around workforce integration might itself provide the greatest opportunity for research. What caused the team challenges at client-sites, misunderstandings with new colleagues, and general misalignment around how the new teams might best work together? One way to understand this was through the divergent value-chains that the consulting firm and its design and innovation unit espoused. This was merely the background though, and to understand these tensions further required this researcher to forge a path around engaging those with first-hand experience of these integrations and who might be able to leverage their perspective to provide insights into what might be done. With a view to addressing the tension around workforce integration, the findings that these interviews generated would provide the basis for identifying a set of recommendations that might ultimately better align a consulting firm's value-chain with that of its design and innovation unit. This in turn would underpin the goal of this

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research paper which, as simple as it may be, was to provide a way forward for consulting firms to better integrate their workforces.

Over the last five chapters, readers will have explored the building blocks of this project in detail. In one chapter, the literature review exposed elements of the discussion surrounding design thinking, its value as a powerful, generative process, and its recent popularization among business circles. This attention, well deserved, has also increased the rate of investment in design and innovation units by consulting firms. In so doing, this chapter highlights the misalignment between the value-chain of a consulting firm and its design and innovation unit. Having set the stage, another chapter evaluated the methods that this author deployed, the fieldwork that counted a number of interviews with both with members of a consulting firm's primary line of business, management consultants, and their design and innovation units. The goal of these interviews was to derive insight from those with first-hand experience of the integration of design and innovation units within the broader workforce of the consulting firm. What these ultimately individuals provided was insight that in the last chapter, the researcher cast through an abridged model - permitting its distillation into findings centred around three categories - training, education, and attitude. From this came a set of recommendation, aimed primarily at the consulting firms but also included certain elements that feature further upstream, like academic programs, which play a critical role in shaping how tensions are manifested downstream. The entire project was, as the reader will recall, couched and further informed by the application of an

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abridged Analysis-Synthesis Bridge Model, which saw each chapter contribute in its own way to the fluid movement from one quadrant to the other, building with it distillation of what could be based on what was - that is the tensions mentioned above. This, in sum, is the research journey and within it the desire to understand how to align the disparate value-chains to better integrate equally disparate workforces.

The answers are not simple but as outlined in the last chapter, the path, shaped by the insights of those who have or are living the integration journey at the writing of this paper, defines a way forward for consulting firms interested in better integrating their recently acquired design and innovation subunit. This way forward - or recommendation - suggests that consulting firms should:

- 1) Provide better business education opportunities for their employees, while academic programs in design and innovation should incorporate more business education into their program structure
- 2) Provide more opportunities for their recently integrated workforces to learn from one another before being placed in client-facing roles
- 3) Make *new-to-the-firm* training programs mandatory for all hires, including all incoming design and innovation unit employees
- 4) Mandate that all staff learn about design thinking and its value to their client projects
- 5) Stop segregating their existing staff and their design and innovation units

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### 6) Improve internal communications programs and their impact

These are the upstream points of intervention, described throughout this paper, as the levers that might influence how tensions might manifest between workforces within the firm and its subunit. Moreover, these steps lay the groundwork for the firm to look inwards and cast an opportunity in the direction of the design and innovation to devise a tailored solution that will address the challenges around integration. What these recommendations lay out are a series of workforce education or training programs, increasing opportunities for integration, and improved communications within a firm meant to better integrate workforces. Further, these recommendations also address other elements that undeniably shape how some of these issues will unfold downstream, such as academic programs, and recent graduates interested in careers in consulting. These are the points of intervention that, if adjusted, might serve to better align the value-chains of the consulting firm and its design and innovation unit - couching the bespoke into the scalable - as way to ultimately address the core question of this paper. Through an effective plan to implement these recommendations, packaged in the previous chapter as a pilot project that would see the design thinking process and cycle rolled out to explore tangible solutions, the paper still sees couching the bespoke within the scalable as an immediate approach to addressing some of these tensions. However, doing this – biding time and addressing the immediate and very real tensions - may ultimately lead to the usurpation of the scalable by the bespoke. This recognizes the ascendant dynamism of design thinking and the

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potential is has to permeate and influence the way businesses, and consulting firms in particular, capture and deliver value.

All told, these recommendations and their implementation are intended to lead to a better-integrated workforce. This researcher, in articulating these recommendations the way they did, believes that they may be pursued independent of one and other, or collectively synchronized, in order to maximize impact on outcomes (better integration) and effect (on workforce). For any firm interested in pursuing either some, many, or all of these recommendations, this researcher believes a pilot program that involves, first and foremost, the integration of the design and innovation unit within the problem finding and framing stage of this engagement, will help build a bespoke solution that fits the needs of the firm and its subunit. This approach might further ensure scalability of a solution across the remainder of the firm. All told, this may in turn validate elements of the approach this project opted to pursue itself, specifically concerning the focus on aligning value-chains as a means to better integrating workforces. Similarly, pilot projects might be necessary for academic programs before being able to incorporate more business elements, recognizing that shifting a programs curriculums takes some time, there are other interim opportunities to address this challenge. This includes finding opportunities for the academic programs to align with local businesses, which might be done by providing students with internships that give them the necessary exposure to business. The approach the previous chapter underscores - along with the whole paper really - is the ultimate need



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to align value-chains as a way to support workforce integration. In that light, it made perfect sense to venture upstream of these issues to provide recommendations focused on leveraging certain points of intervention with influence on the way tensions manifest downstream.

It is important to recall that this research project is merely a first step among many. Further research is warranted in order to build out the findings presented within this paper more robustly. This requires, among other things, expanding everything from sample size to the composition of those interviewed within consulting firms and their design and innovation units, paying attention to gender, position, roles, experience, and exposure to the integrations in question. Methodologically, the research would greatly benefit from deploying a survey (like the one originally proposed but never executed due to poor uptake) and by exploring other methods that might better engage and elicit insight from participants and further increase the reach and quality of answers, both qualitative and possibly quantitative. Should any firms take up some, or any, of these recommendations, further study might be built out around a case to explore the pilot project, its impact, and possible ways forward. This would potentially include defining various implementation models that may be better suited to different types of firms (with different needs, for example). As described in the previous channel, the opportunity might lie to explore the application of these recommendations through the design thinking process – the iterative and generative approach – led internally by the subunit to solve for their own integration challenge. It would also be

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very important to expand the study to include tapping into the perspectives of the academic programs, along with its students, as a way to build a more comprehensive understanding of the pressures, potential, and realities of those who shape (and enter) design and innovation units and consulting firms. All of these potential steps combine to suggest there are many ways to continue this research, whose topic and impact will likely not dissipate anytime soon. As it stands, firms will continue to acquire other firms, and their workforces will struggle to integrate effectively, perhaps highlighting misaligned value-chains or showing a whole new tension to investigate.

These steps are not exhaustive, but they do provide a possible way forward for those firms interested in better integrating their workforces. Knocking at the heart of this project, this researcher looked to consulting and design thinking for a career opportunity but instead found themselves on a journey to confirm the longevity of design thinking within business. While value-chain alignment is the underlining factor that will ensure the staying power of design thinking in business - and impact the integration of workforces that in turn further reinforces this outcome - the recommendations provided in this paper comprise this journey's necessary first steps. While it is this researcher's genuine hope that a firm may someday pursue these recommendations, if nothing else, this paper might in time stand as one signpost among many along that busy highway that will see design thinkers work and ultimately thrive within business community.

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