



**Faculdade de Design,  
Tecnologia e Comunicação**  
Universidade Europeia

2020

**JOSÉ MANUEL  
FERNANDES DOS SANTOS**

## **DESIGN(ER) LEADERSHIP IN LARGE CORPORATIONS**

### **Documento Final**

Dissertação apresentada ao IADE – Universidade Europeia, para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Doutor em design pela via de opção de realização de um programa doutoral, realizado sob a orientação científica do Doutor Carlos Miguel Lopes Rosa, Professor Associado do IADE - Faculdade de Design Tecnologia e Comunicação da Universidade Europeia, e da orientação do Doutor Sebastian Fixson, Associate Dean of Innovation at Babson College e do Doutor António Cruz Rodrigues, Professor Associado da Universidade Lusófona.

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Dedico este trabalho à minha Mãe, que o viu começar mas que nos deixou antes de eu o acabar, por todos os sacrifícios e ofertas que me permitiram sonhar e crescer, teu para sempre.

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## **o júri**

presidente

Doutor Milton Jorge Correia de Sousa,  
Reitor e Presidente do Conselho Científico da Universidade Europeia.

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Doutor Carlos Miguel Lopes Rosa,  
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## palavras-chave

Design Management, design executives, corporate design, design leadership.

## Resumo curto (300 palavras)

Enquanto alguns acreditam que o fenómeno do 'chief design officer' está em crescimento, consultoras respeitáveis como a McKinsey entraram neste território e providenciaram dados e perspetivas importantes sobre o valor do design, evidência que parece sugerir que a liderança de design ao mais alto nível em grandes empresas é algo ainda raro e que não existem muitos designers de formação nessas posições.

Quando iniciámos esta jornada em 2017, articulámos a seguinte questão: Porque não existem mais designers no C-Suite das empresas F50? De acordo com dados publicamente disponíveis, cabiam nos dedos de uma mão os designers de formação (design, arte, arquitetura) nestas empresas a responderem ao CEO, agora em 2020 existe um. Estamos a progredir para uma liderança do design(er) nestas grandes empresas, ou talvez a regredir? Podemos afirmar que a década de 2010-20 que viu algum progresso neste domínio será equiparada com uma nova década de mais liderança do design(er), ou será que o design já está tão embebido em empresas através de iniciativas bem sucedidas de 'design thinking' que estará nas mãos de todos, e a liderança de design nas mãos de líderes tradicionais em diferentes domínios, não dos designers?

Esta investigação e tese de doutoramento ambiciona revelar quais podem ser os fatores a impactar esta realidade. Inclui os resultados de vários esforços de recolha de dados, entre eles um questionário efetuado com executivos de grandes empresas, outro com designers seniores a trabalharem em grandes empresas, e os resultados de conversas pessoais com mais de 30 profissionais com experiência e perspetiva credíveis sobre o assunto. Nesta investigação pretende-se relacionar estes dados e fornecer uma perspetiva sobre o estado da liderança do design(er) em grandes empresas, oferecendo resultados que mapeiam esta realidade, apresentando um meta-modelo, para a comunidade científica, professores, profissionais de design, e outros interessados na exploração deste tema emergente.



## Resumo longo (1500 palavras)

Enquanto alguns acreditam que o fenómeno do 'chief design officer' está em crescimento, consultoras respeitáveis como a McKinsey entraram neste território e providenciaram dados e perspetivas importantes sobre o valor do design, evidência que parece sugerir que a liderança de design ao mais alto nível em grandes empresas é algo ainda raro e que não existem muitos designers de formação nessas posições. Estamos a assistir ao efeito da globalização, e de disputas de comércio internacional que fizeram empresas tradicionalmente orientadas pelo design como a Apple focarem-se mais na otimização de custos, isto enquanto Jonathan Ive abandona a Apple para perseguir o seu próprio design com a LoveFrom.

Quando iniciámos esta jornada em 2017, articulámos a seguinte questão: Porque não existem mais designers no Conselho de Administração das empresas F50? De acordo com dados publicamente disponíveis, cabiam nos dedos de uma mão os designers de formação (design, arte, arquitetura) nas empresas F50 a responderem ao CEO, agora em 2020 existe um. Embora o impacto destas empresas na sociedade, e da quantidade de designers que elas empregam direta e indiretamente, será o design suficientemente importante para ser representado no C-Suite, e estarão os designers a serem convidados mas também dispostos e preparados para aceitar este desafio? Comparando com a era em que Henry Dreyfuss e Elliot Noyes geriam vastos programas de design nas maiores empresas dos Estados Unidos relacionando-se diretamente com os seus CEO's, estaremos a progredir para uma liderança do design(er) nestas grandes empresas, ou talvez ao invés? Podemos afirmar que na década de 2010-20 se vislumbrou algum progresso neste domínio, especialmente na quantidade de designers contratados por estas empresas, indaga-se assim se estaremos perante uma nova década de mais liderança do design(er), ou será que o design já está tão embebido nas empresas através de iniciativas bem sucedidas de 'design thinking' (muitas vezes implementadas por designers) que o design passou a pertencer a todos e a liderança de design acabará nas mãos de líderes tradicionais em diferentes domínios, não de designers?

O primeiro passo do processo de investigação foi definir a estratégia que correspondesse aos resultados pretendidos com a tese, tendo em conta os objetivos e planeamento, assumindo ao mesmo tempo a complexidade do tópico e a dificuldade em aceder aos profissionais certos e aos recursos. Definimos uma aproximação multivariada, iniciando com entrevistas com entidades que podiam oferecer perspetiva e inspiração com base na sua experiência no domínio, a intenção era que estas conversas apontariam para as questões e tópicos que seriam utilizados para construir dois questionários, dirigidos a duas populações distintas, executivos e designers. Entrevistou-se num período de doze meses uma grande quantidade de pessoas com interesse pessoal e participação no contexto da liderança de design em grandes empresas, profissionais de ensino que são agentes ativos na educação e preparação de designers que estão agora ou estarão no futuro em posições de liderança de design em grandes empresas, um grupo de presentes e futuros líderes de design em grandes empresas, empresas de recrutamento especializadas em design, profissionais de recrutamento executivo, e investigadores com investigação relevante sobre o tema. Das conversas gravadas, que obedeceram a um protocolo previamente definido, a maioria destas conversas duraram 1 hora, gravadas, resultou a afirmação unânime que a pergunta base desta investigação era importante, justa e adequada.

Quando iniciámos a investigação, não tínhamos uma direção clara sobre quais podiam ser as causas para a escassez de designers no Conselho de Administração das empresas F50. A expectativa era que, as conversas com especialistas do meio levariam a um conjunto de questões, fatores a impactar esta realidade. Sendo que as conversas foram iniciadas com a pergunta de base, começámos a recolher o que estas entidades consideravam questões e fatores, que resultou na habitual lista com diferentes tópicos agrupados. Por cada três entrevistados a mencionarem o mesmo fator, fomos criando uma lista de base, criando assim clusters semânticos no sentido de agrupar respostas e afirmações por semelhança. Com a evolução das conversas evoluiu também a leitura de bibliografia relevante para o tópico. Na última ronda de conversas, depois dos entrevistados dedicarem algum tempo à pergunta base, apresentávamos a lista dos fatores e pedíamos aos entrevistados para comentar e hierarquizar de acordo com o seu entendimento. A um determinado momento do processo, e de uma lista contendo mais que 16 grupos de condições, definimos os 10 fatores que estão descritos em detalhe na tese, utilizando excertos das conversas com os entrevistados. A ordenação da lista está baseada na sequência que os fatores foram sendo referenciados, conforme se tornavam mais fortes e relevantes. Tivemos pelo menos duas entrevistas que acharam que a lista de fatores demonstrava uma propensão contra o design.

Os fatores que resultaram destas conversas foram:

NECESSIDADE (não há necessidade, o design já está representado, estas

empresas são líderes do seu setor)  
PREPARAÇÃO (os designers não têm a educação e formação certas, as ferramentas, a mentalidade)  
ASPIRAÇÃO (os designers não têm a aspiração/ desejo para assumir este cargo, impede-os de aperfeiçoar as suas práticas)  
ESCASSEZ (não existem suficientes designers qualificados com a experiência certa no mercado)  
FLEXIBILIDADE (designers tendem a focar-se no design, não tem experiência na gestão de outras áreas)  
DESIGN CEO (não existem suficientes CEO's informados sobre o design, executivos que entendem o valor do design)  
EFECTIVIDADE (não é o melhor local para os designers liderarem o design, existem demasiadas distrações)  
ACESSO (designers não são selecionados para o cargo, não são convidados, não são formados e guiados)  
CONSELHO (Conselhos de Administração e consultores não entendem nem aconselham adequadamente assuntos de design)  
ETHOS (a essência de cada designer, atitudes e comportamentos que geram preconceitos e pressupostos)

Definiu-se entre candidato e orientadores da tese e uma organização especializada em executivos de grandes empresas (The Official Board, mantém a base de dados mais compreensível de quadros organizativos de empresas), um questionário curto para executivos focado na liderança de design em grandes empresas. O questionário teve que ser curto devido à natureza das entidades alvo.

Definiu-se igualmente entre candidato e orientadores da tese, um questionário mais amplo dirigido a designers seniores/ fase de carreira avançada em médias e grandes empresas, desta vez solicitamos ajuda a organizações que agregam designers nos diferentes domínios (IDSA – Industrial Design Association of America, AIGA – Professional Association for Design, Design Museum Foundation). Este questionário cobriu um conjunto de áreas, desde demografia a percurso da carreira e perspetiva.

Ambos os questionários tinham um conjunto de questões em comum, e sendo que não foram escritas da mesma forma, os dados recolhidos são comparáveis e permitem a comparação e criação de perspetiva. Os dados e as perspetivas dos dois questionários relativamente aos fatores revelaram o seguinte:

NECESSIDADE – Executivos parecem crer que existe menos necessidade de designers no Conselhos de Administração, que estes não contribuem o suficiente para o desempenho da empresa, designers não vem isso como razão válida para que eles não estejam a esse nível;  
PREPARAÇÃO – Sendo que existiram duas questões no questionário executivo sobre preparação (formação e mentalidade), tanto executivos como designers tendem a acreditar que a preparação e de facto um fator relevante para explicar a escassez de designers a este nível;  
ASPIRAÇÃO - Existe um desacordo fundamental entre executivos e designers sobre a aspiração/ desejo, uma grande quantidade dos executivos acreditam que os designers não estão presentes nos Conselhos de Administração porque não querem, não o desejam, e este é provavelmente o resultado mais distinto de ambos os questionários;  
ESCASSEZ – Executivos acreditam que existe uma maior escassez de designers qualificados que os designers;  
FLEXIBILIDADE – Executivos pensam que os designers ao terem um foco limitado relativamente a sua atividade, torna-se um dos principais fatores explicando a escassez de designers no Conselho de Administração, muito para além daquilo que os designers acreditam.

A investigação, os dados recolhidos complementados com a experiência do autor correspondente desta tese, ajudou a definir o enquadramento que necessita de ser abraçado por designers e não designers. Este enquadramento está focado nos preconceitos e pressupostos que cada lado tem sobre o outro, muitas vezes não expressado, mesmo assim importante e presente de tal forma que impede as empresas de usufruírem do design ao máximo e os designers de contribuírem ao máximo para o sucesso das empresas e da sociedade em geral.

O futuro da sociedade e das empresas impactarão e serão impactadas pelo futuro do design, um formador com 30 anos de experiência que formou > 1.000 designers no decorrer da sua carreira afirmou categoricamente que o papel de um designer como o conhecemos no presente vai essencialmente desaparecer. Esta investigação e tese

doutoral almeja revelar aqueles que podem ser os fatores, razões que impactam esta realidade, aborda o passado, o presente e o futuro da liderança de design em grandes empresas, relaciona os dados e fornece perspectiva sobre o estado da liderança de design(er) em grandes empresas, oferecendo resultados que mapeiam esta realidade, apresentando um meta-modelo, para a comunidade científica, professores, profissionais de design, e outros interessados na exploração deste tema emergente.





## keywords

Design Management, design executives, corporate design, design leadership.

## Short abstract (Max. 300 words)

While there are those that believe the chief design officer is a growing phenomenon, and respected companies like McKinsey have stepped into the arena and provided very important data and insights attesting the importance of design, evidence seems to suggest that design leadership at the highest level in large corporations is still rare and that there aren't many trained designers in those positions.

When we started this journey in 2017, we articulated the following question: Why aren't there more designers in the C-Suite of F50 corporations? According to publicly available data, there were less than a handful formally educated designers (design, art, architecture) in the F50 reporting to the CEO, now in 2020 there is 1. Are we progressing towards design(er) leadership in large corporations, or perhaps regressing? Can we say that the decade of 2010-20 that saw some progress in this domain will be matched by a new decade of more design(er) leadership, or has design been so deeply engrained in corporations through successful design thinking initiatives that design will be in the hands of everyone and design leadership in the hands of traditional leaders in different domains, not with designers?

This research and doctoral thesis attempts to shed some light on what might the insights impacting this reality. It includes the results of various data collection efforts, among them a survey done with large corporations' executives, another with senior/ mid-career designers working in large companies, and the result of personal conversations with more than 30 professionals with experience and credible point of view on the topic. The thesis attempts to connect the data and provide insights on the state of design(er) leadership in large corporations, and provides insights that map this reality, while providing a meta-model for those designers, and others interested in changing it.

## Long abstract (Max. 1500 words)

While there are still those that believe the Chief Design Officer is a growing phenomenon, and respected companies like McKinsey have stepped into the arena and provided very important data and insights attesting the importance of Design, evidence seems to suggest that design leadership at the highest level in large corporations is still rare and that there aren't many trained designers in those positions. We are witnessing the effect of globalization and trade disputes that have made traditional Design led companies like Apple focus strongly on cost cutting, this is while Jonathan Ive leaves Apple to pursue his own Design ways with LoveFrom.

When we started this journey in 2017, we articulated the following question: Why Aren't There More Designers in The C-Suite of F50 Corporations? According to publicly available data, there were less than a handful formally educated designers (design, art, architecture) in the F50 reporting to the CEO, now in 2020 there is one. Despite the impact of these corporations in society at large, and the sheer number of designers they employ directly and indirectly, is design important enough to be represented in the C-Suite, and are designers being invited but also willing and able to take on that challenge? Compared to the era where Henry Dreyfuss and Elliot Noyes ran large design programs in the largest corporations in the US and engaged directly their CEO's, are we progressing towards more design(er) leadership in large corporations, or perhaps less? Can we say that the decade of 2010-20 that saw some progress in this domain, especially in the quantity of designers hired by these organizations, will be matched by a new decade of more design(er) leadership, or has design been so deeply engrained in corporations through successful design thinking initiatives (run many times by designers) that design will be in the hands of everyone and design leadership in the hands of traditional leaders in different domains, not with designers?

Before engaging with research itself, there was a need to define a research strategy that would fit the thesis goals, taking into account our objectives and timeline, while acknowledging the complexity of the topic and difficulty in accessing the right people and resources. We defined a multi-pronged approach, starting with 1:1 interviews with entities that could provide insights and inspiration based on their own experience in the domain, the intention was that these conversations would point toward the questions and topics that would be used to build two distinct surveys, aimed at two populations, executives and designers.

We interviewed throughout a period of 12 months a large number of people with a personal interest and participation in the context of large corporation design leadership, namely a Coach with over 30 years of training Design leaders in large corporations, a number of Educators that are active agents in the education and preparation of Designers that are now or will be in leadership positions in large corporations, a number of present and past large corporation Design Leaders, design placement recruiters, an executive recruiter, and Researchers with impactful research on the topic. The majority of these conversation were 1hr long, recorded, with an organized protocol, and 100% of the interviewees stated the question posed by the thesis was either important, fair or simply adequate.

When we started the research, there wasn't a clear indication of what might be the reason(s) for the scarcity of Designers in the C-Suite of the top 50 US corporations. The expectation was that conversations with related specialists would spur a number of different reasons, insights impacting this reality. Since the conversations started with the broader question, we started to collect what the entities assumed were insights, and these started to populate a list that was clustered into several topics. For every 3 guests that mentioned the same insight, we created a shortlist. As the conversations with guests proceeded, so did the reading of relevant related research and publications. In the last round of conversations, after people had some time to respond to the open question, we would present the list of the insights assembled till that moment, and asked them to comment, rank these according to their understanding. At the end of the 25th conversation, and out of a list containing more than 16 clusters, we settled on the 10 insights that are described in further detail in the thesis, while using excerpts of the conversations with the entities to support the chosen list. The order of this list is based on the sequence they appeared in the discourse, as they became stronger and relevant. We did have a couple of the interviewees thought these insights were somehow biased against Design.

The insights that resulted from these conversations were:

NECESSITY (there is no need, Design is already represented, these corporations are at the top of their game)  
 PREPARATION (Designers don't have the right education and training, skillset, mindset).  
 DESIRE (Designers don't want/ aspire this role, stops them from crafting their practice)  
 SCARCITY (not enough qualified Designers with the right experience in the market)  
 FLEXIBILITY (Designers tend to stick to Design, no experience in managing other areas)  
 DESIGN CEO (not enough Design savvy CEO's/ Executives that understand the value of Design)  
 EFFECTIVENESS (not the best/ right place for Designers to lead Design, too many distractions)  
 ACCESS (Designers are not selected for the job, not invited, not mentored and groomed for it)  
 ADVICE (Board of Directors and Consultancies don't understand and advise on Design adequately)  
 ETHOS (at the core of each Designer, attitudes and behaviours that generate biases and assumptions)

We designed, along with the thesis coordinators and an organization specialized in tracking Executives in large corporations (The Official Board, they maintain the most comprehensive directory of corporate organizational charts), a short executive survey on Designer leadership in large corporations.

We also designed along with the thesis coordinators, a longer survey aimed at senior/ mid-career Designers in medium/ large corporations, this time soliciting support from organizations that associate Designers in different domains (IDSA – Industrial Design Association of America, AIGA – Professional Association for Design, Design Museum Foundation). This survey covered a number of areas, from demographics, career path and perspectives.

Both surveys had a number of questions in common, and though they were not written in the exact same way, the data collected is comparable and allows juxtaposing and insight generation. Data and insights from the two surveys regarding the insights revealed:

NECESSITY - Executives seem to believe there is less of a need for Designers in C-level positions, that they don't contribute enough to the performance, Designers don't see that as a valid reason for them not to be at that level;  
 PREPARATION - Though there were 2 questions in the Executive survey related to Preparation (Training & Mindset), both Executives and Designers seem to agree that Preparation is indeed a strong insight to explain scarcity of Designers at this level;  
 DESIRE - There is a fundamental disagreement between Executives and Designers on Desire, a large % of Executives believe Designers are not present at the C-level because they don't want/ desire to, and this might be the most differentiating result in both surveys.  
 SCARCITY - Executives believe there is a bigger scarcity of qualified Designers than Designers do.  
 FLEXIBILITY - Executives think that Designers having a narrow focus in terms of activity is a major insight in explaining scarcity of Designers in the C- Level position, much more than Designers

This research, the data collected combined with the corresponding author's experience defined the framework of needs to be addressed, by Designers and non-Designers. That framework is focused on the underlying biases and assumptions each side has of each other, often unspoken but yet prominent and present in such a way that it prevents companies from making the best of design, and Designers from contributing all they can to the success of companies and society in general.

The future of society and corporations will impact and be impacted by the future of Design, and a 30-year Design coach that has trained >1.000 Designers throughout his career boldly stated that the job of a designer as we know of it today will essentially disappear. This research and doctoral thesis attempts to shed some light on what might the insights impacting this reality, it touches on the past, present and future of design leadership in large corporations, it connects the data and provides insights on the state of design(er) leadership in

large corporations, and provides insights that create a map to help understand this reality, while providing a meta-model for those designers, educators, recruiters, advisors and executives interested in changing this it.

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# Glossary of Terms

AIGA – American Institute of Graphic Arts

BA – Bachelor of Arts

BCG – Boston Consulting Group

CCO – Chief Commercial Officer

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

CDF – Corporate Design Foundation

CDO – Chief Design Officer, now sometimes the Chief Digital Officer uses the acronym

CMO – Chief Marketing Officer

C-Suite – Corporate Suite, also called Executive Suite

CX – Customer Experience

DEO \_ Design Executive Officer, referred by some as the new version of the design savvy CEO

DMI – Design Management Institute

F50 – Fortune magazine top 50 US companies

F500 – Fortune magazine top 500 US companies

HBR – Harvard Business Review

IDSA – Industrial Design Society of America

IES:NCES – Institute of Educational Sciences: National Center for Educational Statistics. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES), established by the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, is the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education. The National Center for Education Statistics is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education.

MA – Master of Arts

M&A – Mergers and Acquisitions

MBA – Master of Business Administration

MDes – Master of Design

MLP – Minimum Lovable Products

MS – Master of Science

MVP – Minimum Viable Product

N-1 – Executive 1 step distanced from the CEO (N)

NPS – Net Promoter Score

O\*NET. database - The O\*NET Program is the US's primary source of occupational information, containing hundreds of standardized and occupation-specific descriptors on almost 1,000 occupations covering the entire U.S. economy

SIC Codes – Standard Industrial Classification (UK)

SOC Codes – Standard Occupational Classification (US)

SVP – Senior Vice President

TMT – Top Management Team

UX/UI – User Experience/ User Interface Design

VC – Venture Capital

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Research motivation**

The corresponding author of this doctoral thesis has been a working professional in the domain of design and design management since 1989 and very early was given the opportunity to manage designers and began the journey of design management per se. In 2011, and after a number of professional experiences with different organizational formats and in different countries, accepted the challenge to go to the United States and start the journey of design management in large corporations, there was a curiosity about how these organisms performed in design terms and an ambition to progress in these organizations. Since then and throughout his career, in the many exposures to designers gathering and discussing design management, there were always heated discussions about the general lack of alignment between design and organizational agendas, the lack of empowerment, responsibility and accountability of designers in top leadership in their organizations, but the insights for the lack of designers in top leadership, especially in large corporations, was always elusive, with anecdotal evidence and lack of qualitative and quantitative data from a systematic approach to the topic. This research started from this motivation, with a focused question: 'Why aren't there more designers in the C-Suite of F50 corporations?'