

1.3 Research objectives

There were three objectives underlying this doctoral thesis:

Objective 1: Discover existing research specifically dedicated to reasons why trained designers do not occupy high level positions in large corporations;

Objective 2: Establish via engagement with designers and executives, insights that might be impeding designers from assuming high level positions in large corporations;

Objective 3: Generate a number of hypothesis that could be researched and discussed via qualitative research, creating a framework for understanding a reality that we knew from the start was complex and sensitive.

Since the beginning of the doctoral thesis and as soon as the corresponding author focused on the main research question, interaction with both designers and non- designers revealed a certain uneasiness with the inquiry. Some senior designers felt there was a certain insinuation that they were either not able or willing to be in high level positions in large corporations, some executives questioned if others representing design at that level were not doing a good enough job, if there was some sort of insinuation that designers would do a better job. The researcher had to explain several times that no insinuation was being formulated, it was a question about why a group of professionally educated people that were hired to do a job in a certain area were not reaching high level positions of management in large corporations, why despite so many stating that professional area was important and the fact that these organizations hire so many of those professionals to carry that job, they were not in top leadership positions in these large corporations.

Many have asked why, why this question, what would be the expected result. The corresponding author has explained that this is personal, but not self-directed, while some might argue the professional career of the corresponding author could have taken him to even higher-level positions in large corporations (he is currently Head of Design in a large global corporation, but not the Chief Design Officer), the reality is that this is not about the corresponding author or about his ambition or lack of it. The inquiry and the results that we have assembled is aimed at a mid-level designer, who has had formal design education, who has already done some people management and enjoyed it, who believes in the power of large companies and desires to be in a position where she can influence the design direction of the company throughout its many areas of impact, sitting side by side with other C-suite executives, managing design up and down, creating value for the

organization and for society. She should be able to aspire this role, she should be able to know how to get there, she should be able to create a plan and act upon it, and she should be able to get there. Hopefully this research and results will help that.

1.4 Research hypothesis

Like with similar research in a doctoral thesis setting, there was a need to start with one or more hypothesis. The most basic hypothesis was that, a) the reason why there aren't more designers in the C-suite of F50 corporations, is because there is no reason why they should be. The second hypothesis was that b) there are a number of insights that justify the reality underlying the inquiry, and that those insights are in fact hypotheses that needed to be researched and validated.

Hypothesis a) was explored by focusing research into reasons why they shouldn't be. Research validated the importance of design in large corporations, and the fact that these corporations employ and impact designers in equally large numbers. Underlying the answer that there was no reason designers should be in the C-Suite of large corporations was the fact that design is already represented in these large corporations, up to a certain level by designers, and in all C-Suites there is one of more executive in charge of representing design. And so, the door was open to the exploration of hypothesis b).

As we progressed with Hypothesis b), several findings started to gain importance, by the sheer number of times they were mentioned by different interviewees as they own explanation to our main question. Each of these findings became an insight, and we researched it and delivered an assessment, in some cases finding evidence and rationale that supported the insight, in others the opposite.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured in a conventional way, following a chapter with the Introduction, there is a chapter with the Literature Review that covers design and designers in business context, covering history, the present and a vision into the future, while contextualizing large corporations as organisms and the role of

design in them. Chapter 3 covers Research Methodology and Procedures, with a description of the chosen methods, underlying rationale, and detailed information on research process and tools. Chapter 4 is about the Research Findings, namely the knowledge and data resulting from the different procedures adopted as research methodology. Chapter 5 is about Research Insights, where we connect the dots between the acquired knowledge and establish grounds for further discussion in Chapter 6 Final Considerations.

The remaining thesis consists of Chapter 7 the listing of the current research limitations and some avenues into future work, Chapter 8 bibliography and then the appendices.

1.6 Publications resulting from this research

There have been two separate publications in different stages of this doctoral thesis, both integrated in the Design Management Institute (Boston, USA) Academic Design Management Conferences (dmi:ADMC).

The first paper was submitted and accepted in 2018 for the 21st dmi:ADMC 'Next Wave', titled "Why aren't there more designers in executive positions in the top 50 Fortune 500 corporations?" (Appendix F), it presented a rationale for the topic and research choices, advanced definitions, shared results of phase 1 secondary research undergone and, explored a number of findings as groundwork for primary research in the following stage of this doctoral thesis. The corresponding author had a chance to attend the event and present in person the paper, embracing the opportunity to engage the academic community and exchange ideas on how to evolve with the remaining work.

The second paper was submitted and presented in 2020 for the 22nd dmi:admc conference 'Impact the future by design', titled "Design(er) leadership in large corporations" (Appendix F), it reported on the progress of the results of various data collection efforts, connected the data and provided insights on the state of Design(er) leadership in large corporations, it began to shed some light on what the most important underlying findings might be. This conference was impacted by the current Covid-19 crisis and it was fully online, the corresponding author presented twice to a large number of registered attendees.