

# The New Definition of Creative Leadership in the Communication Design Industry - Focused on the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to discuss how designers lead and direct 'technology-driven society' using their creative communication skill. To this end, it is required for communication designers to take conscious steps to recognize the future direction of their profession. Despite the advancement in technology, there is a human being at the center of all design activities. From a certain point of view, contemporary communication design takes an open-ended exploration of the subject matter, rather than a finished output. The notion of creative leadership may potentially expand more in terms of improving the methodology of today's visual culture. The paper will examine creative leadership that could be proposed by the challenge of discourse upon the upcoming industrial revolution. Today, communication designers are confronted by new leadership opportunities and challenges. Some leading designers seem to focus on brand new media technologies to prepare the 4th industrial revolutions. However, communication design cannot be discussed in the medium but can be understood as a process. Top-down and bottom-up process is always a concerned about the relationship since the focus of leadership has changed. In the top-down process, the leadership has existed between 'designer and client' because designers have played their role as a problem solver. On the other hand, there is a different model of leadership between 'design and technology' based on bottom-up process, which stem from the design authorship. In this regard, the new definition of creative leadership in the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution proposes a designer as a problem-finder based on the relationship between the 'designer and the public'.

**Key words:** Creative Leadership, Design Paradigm, Communication Design Industry.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are numbers of discussions about the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution in the field of emerging technology, such as robotics, artificial intelligence, nano-technology using IoT(Internet of Things), 3D printings and big data. To this end, people increasingly make desperate efforts to catch up this trend. However, since the 3rd industrial revolution, the world is filled with consumerism in which the number of objects is overflowing but people are ceaselessly encouraged to buy new products and throw away old ones. Companies advertise brand new products and designers develop more creative ways to lure people, through diverse mass media. Referring specifically to communication design, it is no exaggeration to say that designers have become the spearhead of today's image-dominated culture, which has led to consumption. This might raise questions regarding the meaning of leadership in communication design.

In this regard, one of the most significant discussions is how do designers lead and direct 'technology-driven society' using their creative communication skill. It is needed that further considerations for the significant aspect of leadership. It can bring an 'increased awareness of responsibility' to the communication design.

There are various definitions of leadership but they might not be clear when applied to the communication design. In this paper, 'creative leadership' will be investigated in two aspects of principal concepts, which are 'designer as a problem solver' and 'designer as a problem finder'. In addition to this, creative leadership of communication design in 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolutions as a creative process, which has contributed toward today's visual culture, will be discussed.

## 2. THE BACKGROUND OF CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

### 2.1 Leadership in the creative field

When it comes to leadership, it is defined as 'a process of social influence in which a person can enlist the support of others in the accomplishment of a common goal'. Therefore, managing creativity can be dealt with leadership in

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communication design since the creativity of commercial artwork should be managed to fulfill client's needs. As Hollis defines, design is 'business of making or choosing visual elements and arranging them to convey an idea' [1]. This definition implies that communication design is more involved in the notion of innovation, which suggests the creative process as a method in the diverse situation. Creativity as a 'boundary phenomenon', which was suggested by Ibbotson can be applied in this case [2].

According to 'Creative Economy Report 2010' published by UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), "the creative industries are the cycles of creation, production and, distribution of goods and services that use creativity and intellectual capital as primary inputs" [3]. Fig.1 shows that the communication design industry is not clearly classified, because whole design activities are connected other creative industries. Newbigun suggested that most of today's economy needs creative intelligence and imagination as 'essential infrastructure of our societies' [4]. Therefore, it is needed how to define creative industries as each industry has a different amount of potential economic value originating from original ideas, skills, and talent in terms of creativity.

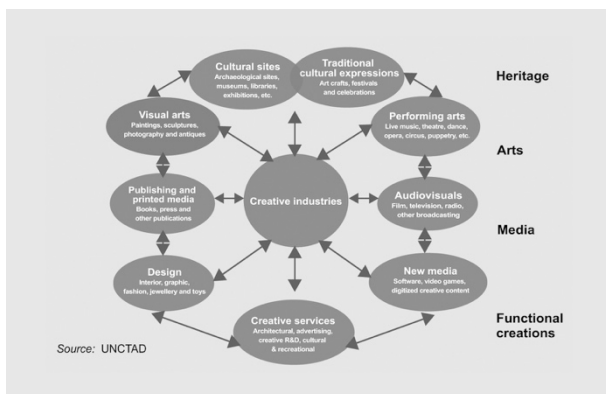


Fig. 1. UNCTAD classification of creative industries [3]

The understanding creativity, especially the professional design field, involves the client's beliefs and values in order to create a unique product or innovative solution. According to Ibbotson, managers or directors in a creative group can meet a lot of constraints such as different perspectives, different approaches, skills and beliefs [5]. These factors may explain the relatively different concept definitions of creativity between design and art. In General, creativity can be developed from conflict of opinion or outside of existing boundaries. However, as the creativity of art that associate with the conception of expression and individuality is notable while creativity of design can be concerned as a problem-solving process because designers seek solutions to public communication problems.

## 2.2 Meaning of leadership in the traditional design field

The initial building block of the leadership model in the traditional design field is 'transactional leadership'. The set of exchanges between leaders and followers that are important to industrial functioning. For example, clarification of responsibilities and objectives, and giving rewards for fulfilling

obligations. This type of leadership is necessary in organizations, yet tends to be limited to the achievement of expected levels of performance. For individual designers to exceed these expectations, more than just the exchange of positive reward is required. Communication designers as transformational leader have a set of additional skills and attributes, such as raising the level of awareness of followers about the importance of achieving valued outcomes, a vision, and the required strategy [5], [6].

Traditionally, leadership in the design industry is mostly focused on the art direction. For instance, a professional creative team in the design field is comprised of various people who play different roles. Undoubtedly, the ability of director in the creative team is highly important to the quality of the results and that can be considered leadership integrating ideas into innovative solutions. A design firm, Pentagram can be a good example to show leadership in the communication design industry. The firm has the partner system, which is based on the premise of collaborative design work among independent designers allowing each partner's own creativity. As Ibbotson and Darso suggest, 'group creative work requires high levels of trust and privacy and a sense of equality before the task' [7]. Thus, this system seems efficient not only in managing creativity in design fields but also to bring more corporate clients. Pentagram has led the contemporary communication design without losing their creativity since they established. It can be said that they epitomize the leadership in design fields for clients as a 'problem solver' which include traditional design project process of 'top-down' strategy.

## 3. PARADIGM CHANGE IN COMMUNICATION DESIGN

### 3.1 Changing attitude against the traditional model of communication design

In recent years, the practice of communication design discipline has significantly changed, reflecting today's visual culture. The term 'graphic design' has continuously changed, from graphic communication, visual communication design to communication design. In 2007, the ICOGRADA (The International Council of Graphic Design Associations) General Assembly consented to use the term 'communication design' because the purpose for an expanded media platform and advanced digital technology has affected the design disciplines and methodologies [8]. This evolving nomenclature may reflect that communication design is highly engaged with various values, economic feasibility, and socio-cultural background. Regarding this, the notion of communication design should be dealt with more holistic way, as is a method that involves and modulates the monologue, conversation, and discussion of our life.

In a traditional definition of the communication design discipline is 'design as a problem-solving' tool. That is all about the involvement in the client's message as a facilitator. This situation has 'top-down' process which needs a director as a leader. However, there were some different points of view on this notion of communication design. As Potter claimed the term 'visual communication' or 'graphic design' means a sign

that attempts to consciously convey a message [9]. Based on his argument, it can be assumed that the role of communication design is not simply a vehicle of the content but a vehicle that authorizes and modulates the content. In 1991, British design critic Rick Poynor wrote the essay ‘designer as author’ in Blueprint magazine. He suggested that authors as design are apt to justify their visual interventions of its originality and creativity [10]. This implies that designers have become more concerned about creating contents as well as applying their theories to in and out of the sphere of design. Design theories mainly started in academia since they should be established as pedagogical philosophy. However, theoretical activities in communication design have significantly affected not only design criticism but also professional practices. This paradigm is highly related to the emergence of design authorship.

In this regard, defining the leadership in the authorial identity of communication design may imply contemplation on the role of the designer. McCoy defined that designers are ‘highly skilled’ people who are proficient in the interpretation of messages, which means they could be interpreted as an authoritative deliverer of messages rather than just following clients’ needs. She asserted that designers should authorize “additional content and a self-conscious critique to the message” [11]. In addition to this, she adopted linguistic terminology to communication design using the term ‘visual language’, since visual communication design components such as image and text are to be read, seen and interpreted. Burdick also argued, “designers must consider themselves authors, not facilitators” [12]. This is evident in her argument that designers are crucially dissatisfied with simply using the visual techniques without in-depth consideration and understanding of the message. Examining a range of designers’ roles. Frascara argued that the needs for ‘responsible designers’ as they inevitably impact the general public [13]. What has emerged from his argument is increased awareness of professional, ethical, social and cultural responsibility of design. Some design activism represented by ‘First things first manifesto 2000’ is a good example of the case.

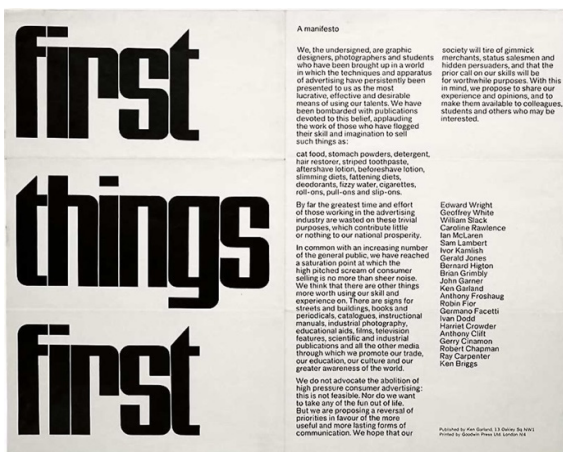


Fig. 2. First things first Manifesto (1964)

The concern of designers or visual communicators to embrace the social problem has started from 1964 when one of the most important design manifestos, ‘First Things First’,

published by Ken Garland in London (Fig. 2). After 35 years later, leading designers, such as Jonathan Barnbrook, Nick Bell, Andrew Blauvelt, and many more who have redrafted the previous manifesto, published again to continue its spirit. However, it has also received much criticism from their own and other design practitioners in the industry. Generally, it can be said that designers have realized what they have created for the last several decades. As a matter of fact, design have impacted on shaping the landscape of visual culture. This is an example, which copes with constraints of creative leadership in different ways since they actively participate in the environmental, social and cultural crisis including ‘bottom-up’ process. Moreover, designers challenge and suggest other perspectives of expression [14].

Barnbrook asserted that communication design conveys a message through mass production, which can spread rapidly [15]. As a result of this, almost all different pieces of visual images, whether they have been manipulated or not, have affected on forming culture since the 3rd industrial revolution started. Furthermore, the critical distinction of creative leadership is that designers can act independently influence on the society with their professional communication skill, and bring issues that resonated with the public. In 2000, ICOGRADA suggested ‘Design Education Manifesto’. It is crucial to see this manifesto because they describe designers as communication leaders in the technology-driven media paradigm. According to this manifesto, ‘developments in media technology and the information economy have profoundly affected communication design practice and education’ [8]. More specifically, it can be said that changing media paradigm brought new challenges into the creative leadership expanding the range of design issues.

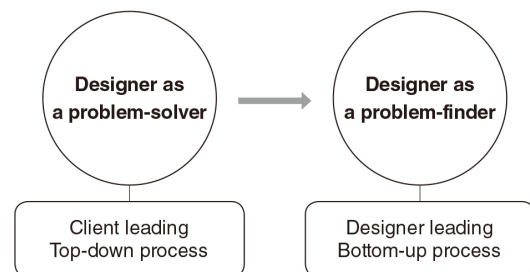


Fig. 3. Paradigm change of positioning communication designer

One of important traits of creative leadership is designers use the bottom-up design process as a development of transformational leadership. Bass and Avolio suggest that transformational leadership skills can be developed using a series of processes. An important assumption behind this model is that an effective approach to self-development will be associated closely with effective development of others [16]. This process shows that a changing attitude of communication design is key factor of creative leadership in this era.

- (1) Consider your results in relation to norms.
- (2) Look for similarities and differences between your self-ratings and ratings by other people, if they are available.

- (3) Identify events, behavioural incidents or actions that help you to interpret your profile.
- (4) Focus on behaviours at this stage rather than introspecting on intentions behind behaviours.
- (5) Identify strengths and development needs based on your profile.
- (6) Develop awareness of what you can change.
- (7) Write an action plan with a focused list of priority areas to work on.
- (8) Develop behaviours using a range of strategies, such as observing other leaders, behavioural modelling, skills training, discussions with other leaders and mentors.
- (9) Monitor and review progress and adapt action plan accordingly.

### 3.2 The responsibility of communication design which stems from design authorship

The notion of creative leadership is based on the model of transformational leadership. It is derived from a growing awareness of, and need for, the kind of leadership that can inspire individuals and organizations to achieve at the highest levels of performance [16].

The emerging idea of leadership in design fields can be discussed in relation to design authorship. According to AIGA (American Institute of Graphic Arts), ‘every designer is encouraged to be engaged with projects which are socially relevant in order to use their creative talents to demonstrate the value of designers’ purpose’ [17]. This statement identifies a key shift in the range of approaches to contemporary communication design in recent years and it perhaps not surprising that designers are more attempting to ‘speak out their own voices’ [18].

Another significant shift has come about in the role of design, which might transcend the traditional definition of designers as service providers into individual and collaborative authors [19]. Design authorship lies in the possibility that designers can take responsibility for the content of design work, which they intend to communicate [20]. Thus, it might be suggested that design authorship can be considered as a new form of leadership in the whole communication design field.

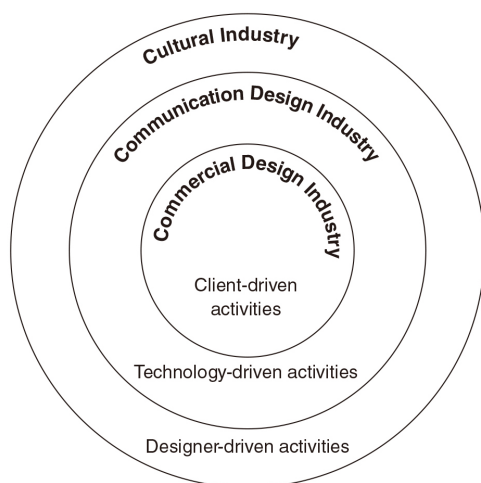


Fig. 4. A typology of the design industry

Arguably, it seems not necessary to propose a standard alternative model, such as designer as a translator, designer as a performer, or designer as a director. It could be considered as another model of specific communication design sector since previous models only focus on the processes in design activity. Design authorship should be categorized by what they made not how it developed. Creative leadership is a method of communication skills. Therefore, the actual meaning of leadership in the communication design is not just art directing visual form but more like collaboration, which is based upon the notion of partnership and responsibility since most of the success of great leadership lies in the ability to move people’s mindset and attitude.

Communication design, to a great extent, is technology-driven, and there is a risk that visual messages or information can be manipulated. It seems not feasible that designers stop to create new visual images to change this phenomenon. However, there is a possible solution to alleviate this, which is encouraging designers to recognize the needs of the social and physical environment where they work. The improvement of technologies has facilitated to access and share diverse information, which empowered communication design to engage in more sociocultural projects. Franscara asserted that communication designers can set the paradigms of their activity by identifying and defining areas, rather than reacting to requests for their intervention, which traditionally come after paradigms have been set [13]. Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesizing that communication design can contribute to making significant changes in society.

Over the past decades, communication designers ceaselessly endeavored to speak out their critical voices. This is not because of their authorial aspiration but because of vocational and professional authenticity. As McCarthy criticized, these designers enjoy “an elevated authorial status, employing a signature style that clients seek” [21]. It is noticeable how these designers have kept the balance between client-based projects and self-initiated ones while applying their philosophy and critical attitude to their communication design practices. Barnbrook is one of the most recognized designers of the UK. He has designed diverse printed media and digital typefaces running his own studio since 1990. In his mostly self-authored projects, he addresses numerous topics: asocial conscience, his thoughts against consumerism, as well as international politics including terrorism and war. He is quite well known evenly for both client-based and self-initiated works. This implies that he has a strong role in facilitating social change. As an entrepreneur, he also runs a digital typeface foundry, which is called ‘Virus’. However, as he publically says, the purpose for running this company is not to gain more profit but to enrich the design field.

Designers’ self-initiated works are stem from the notion of authorship in communication design, which has changed the title of discourse: ‘design authorship’, or ‘designer as author’. The term design authorship may lie in the possibility that communication designers can operate not only traditional means of communication as service providers but also expanded the meaning of communication: taking responsibility for ‘content and context that they have involved’. Authorship is a term which describes the generation of new content in any

form and is transferable across disciplines. The term ‘authorship’ has been more commonly used to describe work where the source content and the message is generated by the same person who ‘realizes’ it or makes it manifest. In this regard, the fundamental concern of design authorship is expanded activities of communication with their diverse visual vocabularies suggesting different ways of seeing, reading and writing. And these considerations of visual intervention might raise the importance and potential of designers’ self-directed practices as an author, which has been discussed over the last three decades.

On the other hand, as the industry serves the systematic needs of all the economic sectors, not only individuals but also organizations or companies have changed their behavior to the society. As Tapscott and Williams asserted, the mass collaboration or peer production is a crucial paradigm shift where people continuously generating creative works, not for profit but will be rewarded in a proper way [22]. Consequently, this kind of paradigm shift is important because they represent the creativity of the invisible majority. It seems difficult to say that creative people, especially designers, could lead and direct the business model. However, some people have started to explore a new way of innovative process in order to keep ahead of the rival companies to make more profit. For example, a fashion designer Otto von Busch has worked with small local communities and changed the whole process of manufacturing. He found out the major problem, which is wasteful system of the fashion industry. Therefore, he uses his creativity designing with used materials, which developed as a production system called up-cycling. As Howkins suggested, the ‘creative people’ who take control over the creativity, is one of the crucial management factors in the economy of ideas [23]. Thus, it can be argued that the starting point for creative leadership could be considered from the individual level.

#### 4. THE NEW DEFINITION OF CREATIVE LEADERSHIP IN COMMUNICATION DESIGN

Today, new opportunities and challenges of leadership confront the communication designers. It is required for communication designers to take conscious steps to recognize the future direction of their profession. The boundaries among design disciplines have become flexible using advanced technologies. As a communication leader, the role and purpose of communication design need to be redefined in the range of

expanded media context’. The creative leadership that we have identified therefore assists in our understanding about the role of leadership. The communication designers can create new value in the society and it also can facilitate the cultural understandings providing effective information and enhancing communication among people.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolutions, some leading designers seem to focus on brand new media technologies. However, communication design cannot be discussed in the medium but can be understood its process. Top-down and bottom-up process is always concerned about the relationship as the focus of leadership has changed. There is the creative leadership between designer and client. Communication designer conducted their projects in the top-down process as problem-solver. On the other hand, there was a different model of leadership that is between design and technology based on bottom-up process. In this regard, the new definition of creative leadership in the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution can be suggested that a designer as problem-finder based on the relationship between designer and public (Fig. 5). In the communication design field, the notion of innovation does not mean brand new way of making things that based on digital technology. Gradually, designers started asking ‘why should it be designed’ instead of asking ‘what to design’. It might be discussed that approaching designer-driven leadership to our society, and it can be the leverage of the new industrial situation.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that to what extent leadership can be considered and applied in terms of communication design. The rapidly changing media paradigm has impacted on the responsibility of communication design as a communication leader. An insight of creative leadership in the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution is changing attitude of communication design. Leadership is important to manage and lead people, especially in a specific group or team. However, as can be seen above, the notion of leadership could be applied very differently, in the changing paradigm of creative industries. Actual meaning of creative leadership is based on the ability to connect people. There is a reason why social responsibility is considered the most important element for the leadership in communication design. Despite the advancement in technology, there is a human being at the center of all design activities.

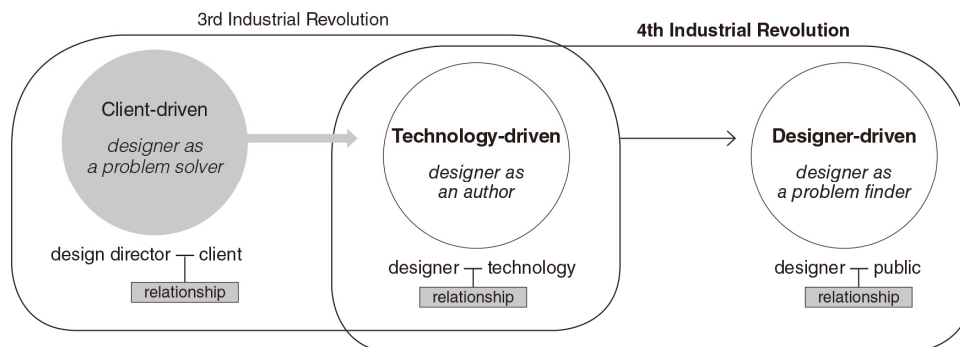


Fig. 5. Paradigm change of creative leadership model

Once the higher level of management changes, the whole system can be changed in an innovative way. Business is fearful of change but 'change' comes from creativity. It can be said that creative leadership is changing behavior since each person's behavior is the thing that is causing problems. People collectively re-design lifestyle. The potential for creative leadership is how to re-design the dysfunctional world. It is an attempt to re-design paradigms which based on underlying systems. The role of designers is limited until the 3<sup>rd</sup> industrial revolution. However, social concerns and different constraints have emerged in the last few decades, where people rely on social constraints that largely solve a problem.

As a result of this, managing organization or projects has become more complex and difficult. Most of the constraints of management in business could be considered as a problem of the organization. Once a problem has been identified the solution exist within it. Therefore, the purpose of creative leadership that discussed in this paper, based on the idea of 'creativity for creative'. Some issues emerging from this finding are related specifically to designer-driven leadership as a problem finder.

Contemporary design takes an open-ended exploration of the subject matter, rather than a finished output. The notion of creative leadership may potentially expand more, improving the methodology of today's visual culture. Consequently, an examination of the creative leadership could propose the challenge of discourse upon the upcoming industrial revolution. Further research might be explored and developed based on this paper.

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