WHY CHANGE-MANAGEMENT ISN'T WORKING (ALSO: KILL THE STAR-DESIGNER).

Yesterday I had a revelation: change-management isn't working.

Now, I'm pretty confident I'm not the first person that has had this thought. Even more, probably everyone who has ever experienced change-management (be it on board level or as an employee) will probably have had some doubt about the effectiveness of change-management.

WHAT EXACTLY IS CHANGE-MANAGEMENT?

Change-management is not not working because it's a faulty proces, it's not working because you're not using it correctly.

There are two ways of change: change by design and change by disaster. Most change in the corporate world (and beyond if we're being honest) is change out of necessity, not vision or leadership. It's change because Business As Usual (BAU) is hurting.

During these times of necessity, most companies turn to some sort of change-management. And then another method, maybe an external consultant after that, to end up with doing exactly the same as they did before, only to find out it's still not working.

Now here's the thing. Change-management is not intended for situations where BAU isn't working anymore. It isn't working because change-management is not about managing change. It's about changing the way you manage.

> *"If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading."*

This may sound like something fairly similar, but trust me, it's not. When changing the way you manage, you're only looking at the efficiency of your process. How much time, energy, money,… you waste while creating whatever it is that you're creating. Change-management has absolutely no interest in whatever it is you, as an organization, are doing. It has no opinion on whether what you're doing is effective or not, it only looks at the efficiency of things.

And let's face it, when people are no longer interested in your products or services, price is often not what changed their minds. When whatever it is you're doing is no longer relevant (or if your target audience no longer sees the relevance, same thing), doing things more efficiently will not structurally change your situation. You're basically prolonging your imminent death rather than resurrecting. Or as Lao Tzu supposedly said: *"If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading."*

FROM CHANGING MANAGEMENT TO MANAGING CHANGE.

The real question then is how to manage change, especially in extreme economic volatility. The answer to that is by using the method built for that. And that method is called design. So the real question you should ask yourself is: "How can we manage design in our organization?", or more precisely: "How can we purposefully (re)design our organization?".

Here are some of the ways you shouldn't be doing that:

- By hiring a "creative" (whatever that might be) and not making her/him part of the strategic business team.
- By outsourcing your problems to someone else and hoping your structural problems will magically disappear.
- By hiring someone from your target audience to speak with her or his peers (Hey guys, we've hired someone who's on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest AND also likes to drink expensive coffees. We're saved!).
- By not doing anything and hoping things will solve themselves (it's surprising how often CEOs pick this one).

The only way to let innovation change something in your organization is by actually letting it…

There's a reason why more and more start-ups are being founded by designers or people with a design background. Why Apple made Jonathan Ive their Chief Design Officer instead of keeping him the guy who makes their products. Why companies like Google Ventures use SPRINT, which is basically the design method on speed.

And that reason is: in times of volatile economies, there's absolutely no strategic advantage to being immobile. Change is directed through design as a proces. And the good thing about processes is that they can be copied, changed to fit and upscaled. There's only one thing standing in the way (apart from the lack of vision often): the egos of creatives.

DECOUPLING DESIGN (THE PROCES) FROM DESIGN (THE CRAFTSMANSHIP), OR EVEN FROM DESIGNERS (THE EGO).

Now don't get me wrong, as a lover of beautifully crafted things I can really enjoy a building of Corbusier or Ollivetti's Leterra 22 typewriter (as far as the Leterra 22 is concerned, enjoying is hardly a strong enough verb. You should see it to believe the insane level of detail and mastery that's in that machine), but as long as we're not decoupling the proces of design from the people who have mastered it within a certain craft, this structural economical crisis we are experiencing is not likely to go anywhere.

Elon Musk, Steve Jobs, Larry page,… are not just extremely brilliant people, they have also mastered design thinking as a strategic business proces. They understand there's a difference between the artistry that often comes with design, and design itself.

*When designing, you should always be aware that whatever you think the solution is, it's probably not that.*

When designing, you should always be aware that whatever you think the solution is, it's probably not that.

Design-thinking starts from the notion that you don't know what you don't know (which makes it radically different from our traditional science-thinking where you first create a thesis on how you think reality works, and then, starting from knowing what you don't know yet, check wether or not it withstands the real reality). When designing, you should always be aware that whatever you think the solution is, it's probably not that.

I intend to write some more articles on the process itself and how to apply it on a strategic level, but Dan Nessler recently did a great job describing the process here, so go and check that out!
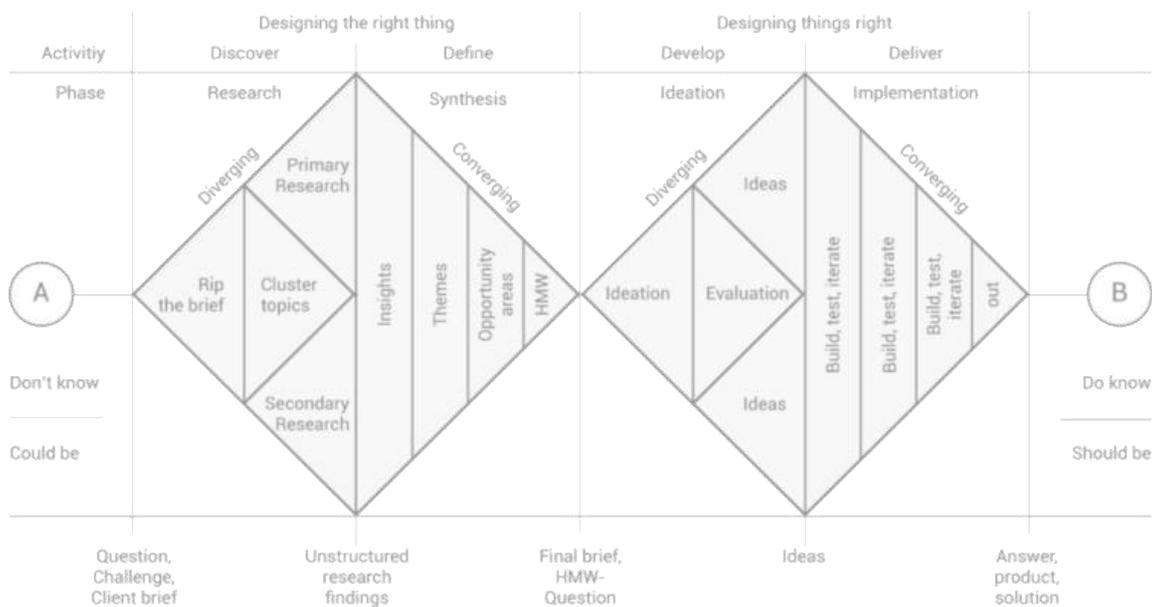
It's time to kill (not literally) the star-designer and allow design to grow as a strategic business process. And while we're at it, let's also rethink how we teach and talk design. As long as the main focus is output (preferably in product-form), it's pretty hard to elevate design (the process) as something that's actually important in guiding our society through these confusing times where we don't know what we don't know yet.