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Cultivating Creativity: Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Organizational Support for Design Teams

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Cultivating Creativity:
Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Organizational Support for Design Teams
Nick Porter
University of San Diego

Introduction

Creativity can be defined as the ability to generate, promote, discuss, and realize new ideas and solutions to challenges (Özarallı, 2015). It is the most important quality of graphic designers, who are expected to use their imaginations to visually communicate ideas that engage, educate, and captivate (Bortz, 2019). Although graphic designers tend to be creative by nature, creativity does not emerge regardless of circumstances—it is a phenomenon that can only exist under certain conditions. In design organizations, the leader’s first priority is to provide the conditions necessary for creativity to exist (Amabile, T., & Khaire, M., 2008).

According to the Design Management Institute, “The primacy of design leadership is to establish a structure that nurtures designers in their quest for creativity” (Miller & Moultrie, 2013, p. 36). But how does a design leader establish this structure? Many design leaders begin their careers as designers (PayScale, 2019) who are then promoted into leadership roles as a result of proven creative success, technical expertise, and formal design education—does the possession of these skills result in a leadership style that ignites design team creativity? Unfortunately, no. A graphic designer’s responsibilities are primarily technical; a design leader’s responsibilities are primarily organizational (Merholz & Skinner, 2016). To be successful in their transition into design leadership, graphic designers must recognize that, while their technical expertise proves critical to their success as a design leader (Miller and Moultrie, 2013), these skills alone are not sufficient for promoting creativity. The new design leader’s primary responsibilities have shifted from “having” creativity, to “cultivating” creativity; their role is to serve as a guide who provides the space and support for a creative culture to develop (Banfield, 2016).

The purpose of this paper is to reveal the leadership, organizational culture, and organizational support characteristics that have been found to have a positive effect on design team creativity. Insights will be drawn from research on existing literature and design leadership studies. The conclusions of the literature review will then be confirmed through data obtained from the “Drawing Connections Between Design Leadership and Creativity” survey (see Appendix A). The goal of this research is to offer graphic designers a set of organizational “best practices” as they transition into design leadership roles.

Literature Review

Leadership

According to Miller and Moultrie (2013), technical expertise in design via formal design education and extensive practice is a critical component of successful design leadership. This is because design leaders with technical expertise are able to (a) adequately represent designers, (b) effectively communicate with designers, (c) appraise the needs of designers, (d) develop and mentor designers, and (e) assess the implications of design collaboration (Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). It should be noted that, while technical expertise has been found to be a critical component of design leadership, technical expertise alone has not been found to result in successful design leadership.

Evidence suggests that an empowering leadership style is a significant driver of employee creativity (Zhang, Ke, Wang, & Liu, 2018). Empowering leadership refers to a leader's deliberate attempt to share power and give more autonomy to their employees. It consists of five categories of behaviors that include (a) leading by example, (b) coaching, (c) participative decision-making,

(d) informing, and (e) showing concern/interacting with the team (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000).

Leading by example refers to a set of “walk the talk” behaviors; the leader exhibits a great deal of expertise and works as hard as or harder than their employees (Arnold et al., 2000). In design leadership, this category manifests itself through a combination of technical expertise and leader actions. As mentioned earlier, design skills are prerequisite to design leadership; design leaders should have enough formal design-training and hands-on design experience to execute—or, at a minimum, to fully understand—the work that is being asked of the design team. Additionally, the leader’s actions will send a signal to the rest of the team about what actions are acceptable versus unacceptable in the workplace (Banfield, 2016).

Coaching refers to a set of leader behaviors that improves employee performance through mentorship and feedback (Arnold et al., 2000). When it comes to graphic designers, mentorship and feedback can be provided in either a creative capacity (i.e., guidance and assistance with design concepts), or a professional capacity (i.e., the identification of organizational behaviors that contribute to the employee’s success within the team).

Participative decision-making refers to a leader behavior that encourages employees to share ideas and feedback to make decisions (Arnold et al., 2000). In a design environment, this occurs during critiques. Critiques are team activities that result in constructive feedback that can be used to enhance creativity. During a critique, the designers provide the feedback, and the leader acts as the facilitator. It is natural for designers to be harsh and evaluative with respect to the work of others (Mumford et al., 2002), so it is imperative that the leader facilitate the critique in a manner that can be done respectfully—so that team members can feel comfortable providing

and receiving feedback without fear of hurt feelings and damaged relationships (Merholz & Skinner, 2016).

Informing refers to a leader's transparency with information related to the organization (Arnold et al., 2000). A design leader should conduct regular team meetings that include company-wide updates, making sure to place special emphasis on any changes that may affect the design team. These team meetings can also serve as an opportunity for employees to share any concerns they may have related to the organization (Merholz & Skinner, 2016).

Showing concern/interacting with the team includes a number of behaviors that demonstrate a general regard for employees' well-being (Arnold et al., 2000). These behaviors include creating a shared sense of purpose, showing empathy, treating employees with respect, and fostering a collaborative environment (Merholz & Skinner, 2016).

An empowering leadership style also develops employees' self-efficacy, which in turn promotes employee creativity—one study shows that employees with high self-efficacy are more likely to generate creative solutions (Özarallı, 2015). Empowering leaders develop self-efficacy by (a) removing bureaucratic constraints to allow for autonomy, (b) delegating authority to employees to allow them to take ownership over their work, (c) involving employees in decision-making processes, and (d) providing employees access to critical organizational information (Zhang et al., 2018).

Organizational Culture

In addition to adopting a leadership style that promotes creativity, the design leader is responsible for establishing a culture that promotes creativity. Research suggests that aspects of

organizational culture that have a positive effect on design team creativity include autonomy, collaboration, and psychological safety (McLean, 2005).

Studies have found that graphic designers have a tendency to seek out and perform better in autonomous work environments (Mumford et al., 2002). In an autonomous work environment, employees have the freedom to do their work and determine procedures as they see fit within the guidelines provided. Autonomy contributes to individual creativity by (a) intrinsically motivating employees and (b) allowing employees to devise solutions to design challenges in a way that works best for them (Mumford et al., 2002). To achieve an autonomous work environment, the design leader must avoid telling people how to do their work; the leader's role is to set expectations and help designers develop their own plan to achieve those expectations. When provided with autonomy, designers take ownership over their work—intrinsic motivation drives them to complete it (Merholz & Skinner, 2016).

In “Organizational Culture’s Influence on Creativity and Innovation,” McLean’s (2005) literature review revealed that collaboration between designers is a key component of team creativity. Collaboration can be defined as a process that aims to clearly define design problems, explore new possibilities, and develop open communication with team members (Vyas, Heylen, Nijholt, & van der Veer, 2009). Brainstorming sessions, design critiques, work division within a team, and the development of project plans are all examples of collaboration within a design environment.

A recent study performed by Ali Taha, Sirkova, and Ferencova (2016) revealed a strong, positive relationship between an environment of psychological safety and employee creativity. Psychological safety refers to an employee’s belief that they are able to express themselves

“without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career” (Kahn, 1990, p. 708).

In a creative environment, psychological safety allows an employee to share their ideas and concepts with team members without fear of embarrassment or rejection; it results in healthy interpersonal relationships and open communication. Healthy interpersonal relationships positively affect individual creativity, while open communication positively affects team creativity (Ali Taha et al., 2016). Producing creative work is both personal and challenging—without psychological safety, employees are likely to withdraw from creative efforts (Mumford et al., 2002).

Organizational Support

The final component of successful design leadership is related to the leader’s ability to support employees in their quest for creativity from an organizational standpoint.

Research suggests that aspects of organizational support that have a positive effect on design team creativity include the configuration of the physical environment, access to resources, and professional development opportunities (Ali Taha et al., 2016; McLean, 2005; Zhang et al., 2018).

Design work requires space for the team to collaborate, engage, and connect with other creatives; the physical environment has a direct impact on the creativity of the work produced. According to Banfield (2016), “seventy-five percent of design leaders suggest that physical space is very important to encouraging creativity” (p. 37). Open studio spaces are common in design organizations. The open studio space encourages collaboration and ideation among design teams; limited closed spaces serve as distraction-free zones for smaller team meetings and brainstorming sessions (Banfield, 2016).

In addition to the physical environment, an employee's access to resources can have an impact on the work produced. Resources include the time and pay necessary for employees to be successful (Zhang et al., 2018). Research has shown that access to resources positively impacts employee creativity—when sufficient resources are available, employees are able to concentrate and fully engage with their work (Caniëls, Stobbeleir, & Clippeleer, 2014). Conversely, inadequate access to resources can lead to frustration and burnout (McLean, 2005). When it comes to time, organizations tend to inadvertently place obstacles (in the form of unnecessary meetings and unreasonable deadlines) in the way of design work. This results in designers having less time to do their work. When it comes to money, “enough must be provided such that employees do not have to put their creative focus on finding more resources” (McLean, 2005, p. 237). It is the leader's responsibility to protect designers' time and ensure they have adequate pay so they are able to complete their work (Zhang et al., 2018).

Within a design organization, there must also be room for professional development. “One of the most noteworthy characteristics of creative people is that they have a substantial investment in expertise and the ongoing development of expertise” (Mumford et al., 2002, p. 710). A designer must be aware of the latest design trends to continually evolve their creative visions; they must also be skilled with the tools and technology that allow them to execute their creative visions. This can be accomplished through attendance at conferences and professional association events, or by taking classes in new techniques and design technology (Sherwin, 2013). The design leader must understand how designers want to grow, whether it be to further develop existing design skills or to learn new design skills.

Statement of the Problem

Graphic designers are creative problem-solvers. They inspire, inform, and influence audiences through type, images, and illustrations. They are obsessed with fonts, colors, and grids. They are passionate about their careers and motivated to continually develop their creative expertise through extensive practice and professional development.

Many design organizations reward this passion and creativity through promotions into leadership roles, thinking that the new design leader's creative skills will result in a highly-inspired, highly-creative team. However, the skills required for successful design leadership are almost entirely different than the skills that resulted in the graphic designer's promotion into leadership. For example, a graphic designer's primary responsibilities are technical; they are expected to (a) have expert knowledge of typography, color theory, and page layout; (b) be trained and skilled in the latest design software; and (c) be up-to-date on industry trends. Success is measured by their creative abilities. On the other hand, while technical expertise is critical to a design leader's success, the design leader's primary responsibilities are organizational; they are expected to (a) work with other leaders to clear the path for design, (b) serve as a mentor and team builder, and (c) create both a figurative and literal space where design can thrive (Merholz & Skinner, 2016). Success is measured by the design leader's ability to cultivate creativity.

For an effective graphic designer to become an effective design leader, they must learn how to cultivate creativity. This includes adopting a leadership style that drives employee creativity, as well as constructing an organizational culture and providing organizational support that allows creativity to flourish. Research suggests that an empowering leadership style drives

employee creativity (Zhang et al., 2018). Additional research suggests that certain characteristics of organizational cultures are more effective in promoting creativity than others. These characteristics include autonomy, collaboration, and psychological safety (McLean, 2005). Creativity can be further enhanced through organizational supports that include configuration of the physical environment, access to resources, and professional development opportunities (Ali Taha et al., 2016; McLean, 2005; Zhang et al., 2018).

Purpose

I am attempting to reduce the adjustment period that occurs when graphic designers are promoted into leadership roles by revealing the conditions that experienced design leaders and researchers have found to be critical to successful design leadership. The purpose of the literature review was to identify leadership, organizational culture, and organizational support characteristics that have been found to influence design team creativity. The primary purpose of the study was to determine if experienced design leaders agree with the findings from the literature review; the secondary purpose of the study was to determine if new design leaders responded in a way that is in conflict with the findings of the literature review, thus confirming the statement of the problem. By making these findings available to graphic designers in their transition into design leadership, my hope is that new design leaders gain insight from experienced design leaders and researchers that will enable them to foster environments that result in highly-inspired and highly-creative teams.

Significance

As the demand for graphic design continues to increase in today's modern business world, there is a growing need for leaders who (a) understand the significance of design and (b) have the skills necessary to cultivate creativity. Recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) suggests that the number of new design leaders in the United States will increase 5% over the next 10 years. Over 75% of these new design leaders will arrive in their roles as mid- to late-career graphic designers (PayScale, 2019). While expertise in graphic design has been found to be essential to design leadership (Miller and Moultrie, 2013), expertise in graphic design alone does not result in successful design leadership.

Graphic designers new to leadership have a natural tendency to approach challenges from the perspective of a graphic designer, versus a design leader. This is frequently manifested through new design leaders (a) taking on design projects or revisions in an effort to avoid conflict, and (b) attempting to fill a creative void by micromanaging designers as they perform creative work (Roque, 2016). In order for graphic designers to be successful in their transitions into design leadership, new design leaders must trade in their technical skills for organizational skills. A design leader's role is to support designers in their quest for creativity, to "help their team succeed, work through challenges, and feel empowered throughout the process" (Lyonnais, 2018). This research is significant because it reveals the leadership, organizational culture, and organizational support characteristics that have been found to best contribute to designer creativity.

Methodology

Study Design

To conduct this observational study, I designed a qualitative research instrument; a 22 question survey. The first set of survey questions are related to demographics, design experience, design education, and team size. The following questions determine to what extent current design leaders: (a) feel that formal design education and prior design experience are critical to design leadership, (b) feel that an empowering leadership style is the most effective style of leadership in terms of driving employee creativity, (c) feel that organizational culture characteristics such as autonomy, collaboration, and psychological safety positively affect creativity, and (d) feel that organizational support characteristics such as physical space, access to resources, and access to professional development opportunities enhance creativity (see Appendix A). The instrument was designed using Qualtrics survey software. Prior to distribution, the survey underwent an extensive review process that included preliminary approval by Fred Galloway, Ed.D., a quantitative research expert, followed by certification and final approval from the University of San Diego's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Sample and Procedure

The survey was distributed electronically using an anonymous link via LinkedIn direct messaging to a random selection of 245 graphic design leaders throughout the United States. I chose this nonprobability sampling technique of purposive (judgmental) sampling to collect my data to ensure that my study responses reflected only those of current design leaders who oversaw the work of one or more graphic designers. The survey was concluded upon reaching 50 complete responses from design leaders, and resulted in 13 responses from design leaders with

0-2 years of experience, 16 responses from design leaders with 3-5 years of experience, and 21 responses from design leaders with 6 or more years of experience. The findings from the survey were used to confirm the findings of the literature review; the findings from the new design leader set (0-2 years' experience) were used to establish whether or not new design leaders fully understand the implications of leadership, organizational culture, and organizational support on creativity.

Results

Demographics

In the first section of the survey, participants were asked to complete demographic questions. Based on the survey, 56% of participants identified as male and 44% of participants identified as female. The age range of participants ranged from 18-54 years old, with 4% of participants reporting an age range of 18-24 years old, 28% of participants reporting an age range of 25-34 years old, 40% of participants reporting an age range of 35-44 years old, 22% of participants reporting an age range of 45-54 years old, and 6% of participants reporting an age range of 55-64 years old. Seventy-nine percent of participants identified as Caucasian, 6% of participants identified as Asian, 6% of participants identified as Hispanic or Latino, 4% of participants identified as Black or African American, 2% of participants identified as Pacific Islander, and 3% of participants identified as other.

Design Leadership Experience

In the second section of the survey, participants were asked to report the number of years they had been in a design leadership role, along with the number of graphic designers they

currently oversee. Twenty-six percent of participants had been in a design leadership role for 0-2 years, 32% had been in a design leadership role for 3-5 years, and 42% had been in a design leadership role for 6 years or more. Fifty-six percent of participants reported overseeing the work of 1 to 3 graphic designers, 34% reported overseeing the work of 4 to 6 graphic designers, and 10% of participants reported overseeing the work of 7 or more graphic designers.

Technical Expertise

In the third section of the survey, participants were asked about their design education and technical experience. Four percent of participants reported having a master's degree or higher in a design-related field, 60% of participants reported having a bachelor's degree in a design-related field, 10% of participants reported having a professional certificate in a design-related field, 14% of participants reported having taken design-related coursework, and 12% of participants reported having no formal design education. Next, participants were asked to rate the statement “Formal design education is critical to design leadership” on a 5-point Likert scale. Twenty-eight percent of participants strongly agreed with this statement, 50% somewhat agreed, 8% neither agreed nor disagreed, 10% somewhat disagreed, and 4% strongly disagreed with this statement.

Participants were then asked if they worked as a graphic designer prior to becoming a design leader and, if yes, the number of years. Eighty-six percent of participants reported working as a graphic designer prior to becoming a design leader, with 12% of participants reported having 0-2 years of prior design experience, 30% reported having 3-5 years of prior design experience, and 44% reported having 6 years or more of prior design experience.

Finally, participants were asked to rate the statement “Former experience as a designer is critical to design leadership” on a 5-point Likert scale. Seventy-two percent of participants strongly agreed with this statement, 18% somewhat agreed, 4% neither agreed nor disagreed, 4% somewhat disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed with this statement.

Leadership

The fourth section of the survey included a series of prompts related to personal leadership beliefs to establish whether a connection existed between leadership style and years of leadership experience. This data was organized into three levels of leadership experience: new design leaders (0-2 years of experience), mid-level design leaders (3-5 years of experience), and experienced design leaders (6 or more years of experience).

The first prompt dealt with the extent with which design leaders felt that design education and technical experience prepared them for leadership. Sixty-nine percent of new design leaders reported that formal design education and/or prior design experience fully prepared them for design leadership; 31% reported that, while formal design education and prior experience as a designer gave them some of the skills necessary, these skills alone did not prepare them for design leadership. Thirty-one percent of mid-level design leaders reported that formal design education and/or prior design experience fully prepared them for design leadership, 6% reported that neither formal design education nor prior experience as a designer gave them any of the skills they needed for design leadership, and 63% reported that, while formal design education and prior experience as a designer gave them some of the skills necessary, these skills alone did not prepare them for design leadership. Ten percent of experienced design leaders reported that formal design education and/or prior design experience fully prepared them for design

leadership, 9% reported that neither formal design education nor prior experience as a designer gave them any of the skills they needed for design leadership, and 81% reported that, while formal design education and prior experience as a designer gave them some of the skills necessary, these skills alone did not prepare them for design leadership.

The second prompt asked participants to choose a set of leader behaviors that they found to be the most effective in driving employee creativity. The behaviors were extracted from the summary of leader behaviors examined across three leadership studies conducted by Pearce and colleagues (i.e., Pearce et al., 2003, table 2) and encompass directive, transactional, transformational, and empowering leadership behaviors. Thirty-one percent of new design leaders reported that they found directive leadership to be the most effective in driving employee creativity, 8% reported transactional leadership to be the most effective, 8% reported transformational leadership to be the most effective, and 53% reported empowering leadership to be the most effective in driving employee creativity. Six percent of mid-level design leaders reported that they found directive leadership to be the most effective in driving employee creativity, 12% reported transformational leadership to be the most effective, and 82% reported empowering leadership to be the most effective in driving employee creativity. Nineteen percent of the experienced-level design leaders reported that they found transformational leadership to be the most effective; 81% reported empowering leadership to be the most effective in driving employee creativity.

The final prompt asked participants to rate the statement “It is the design leader's responsibility to facilitate a culture that allows for maximum creativity” on a 5-point Likert scale. Of the new design leaders, 23% strongly agreed with this statement, 39% somewhat

agreed, 31% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 7% somewhat disagreed with this statement. Thirty-eight percent of mid-level design leaders strongly agreed with this statement, 56% somewhat agreed, and 6% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Seventy-two percent of experienced design leaders strongly agreed with this statement, 19% somewhat agreed, and 9% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.

Organizational Culture

The fifth section of the survey opened by asking participants what they felt the most important role of a design leader was. Forty-two percent of participants reported that the most important role of a design leader is to ensure that design projects are completed accurately, on time, and within budget, 18% of participants reported that the most important role of a design leader is to build and maintain relationships with clients, vendors, and executive leadership, and 40% of participants reported that the most important role of a design leader is to establish a structure that nurtures designers in their quest for creativity.

Next, participants were asked questions related to characteristics of organizational culture and their ability to produce a positive impact on creativity. Participants were asked to rate the organizational culture characteristics of autonomy, collaboration, and psychological safety on a 3-point Likert scale. Ninety-two percent of participants found that an autonomous culture positively affected creativity, while 8% found autonomy to have no impact on creativity. All participants found that a collaborative culture positively affected creativity. All participants also found that a culture that allows members to share ideas and concepts without fear of embarrassment or rejection positively affected creativity.

Organizational Support

In the final section of the survey, participants were asked questions related to organizational support mechanisms. The support mechanisms surveyed included arrangement of the physical space, access to resources, and access to professional development opportunities. Participants were first asked to rate the statement “Physical space is important in encouraging creativity” on a 5-point Likert scale. Forty percent of participants strongly agreed with this statement, 48% somewhat agreed, and 12% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Participants who either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed were then asked to select the type of physical space they found most ideal in cultivating creativity. Seventy percent of participants reported that an open studio space that allows for collaboration is the most ideal space for cultivating creativity, 22% reported that separate office spaces that allow for privacy are the most ideal for cultivating creativity, and 8% reported that remote “spaces” that allow employees to work from home are the most ideal spaces for cultivating creativity.

Participants were then asked a series of questions related to access to resources (i.e., time and money) on a 3-point Likert scale. Fifty-eight percent of participants reported finding a positive connection between access to time and creativity, and 80% of participants reported finding a positive connection between access to adequate pay and creativity.

Finally, participants were asked to rate the statement “Employee participation in professional development activities positively contributes to creativity” on a 5-point Likert scale. Sixty-percent of participants strongly agreed with this statement, 36% somewhat agreed, 2% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 2% somewhat disagreed with this statement. Participants who either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed were then asked to rate

the professional development activities they found most able to positively contribute to employee creativity. Forty-one percent of participants reported that continuing education classes produced the greatest positive impact on employee creativity, 25% reported that attendance at conferences produced the greatest positive impact on employee creativity, 18% reported that online courses produced the greatest positive impact on employee creativity, 14% reported that print and digital publications produced the greatest positive impact on employee creativity, and 2% reported that attendance at professional association events produced the greatest positive impact on employee creativity.

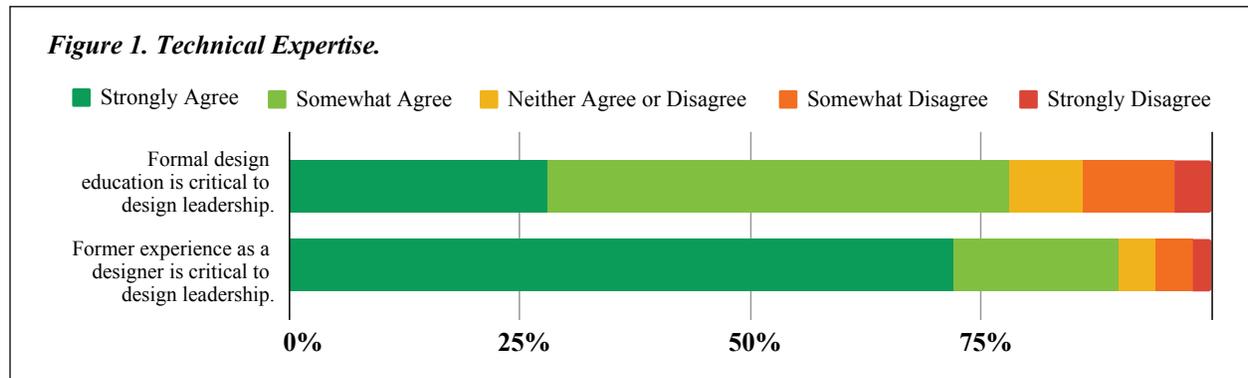
Limitations

This study is not without limitations—particularly pertaining to generalizability and the potential to apply these results to the broader population. The sample included design leaders throughout the United States and resulted in responses from predominantly caucasian design leaders. The application of this research to a more diverse audience and in other countries may lead to different results; therefore, findings should be interpreted with caution.

Analysis

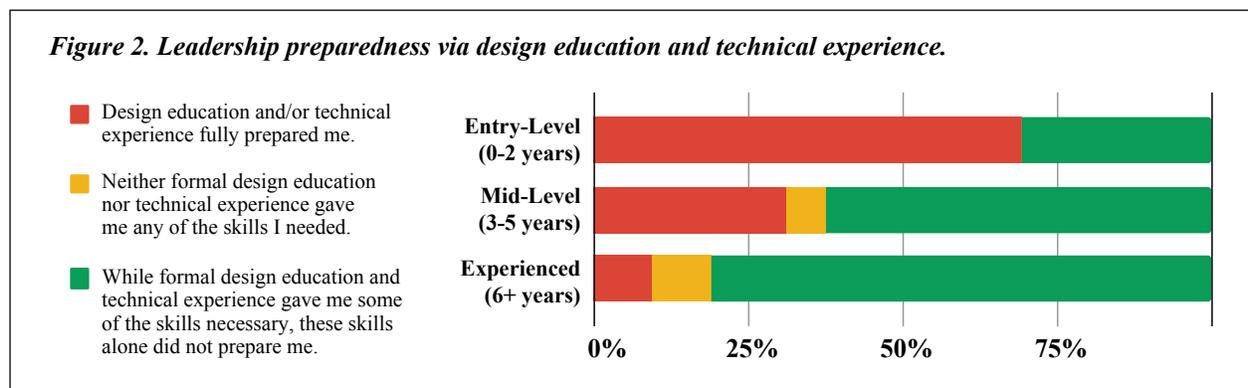
Technical Expertise

The survey results confirmed the findings by Miller and Moultrie (2013) that formal design education and extensive design practice are critical components of successful design leadership. Seventy-eight percent of design leaders surveyed agreed that formal design education is critical to design leadership, and 90% of design leaders agreed that former experience as a designer is critical to design leadership (see Figure 1).

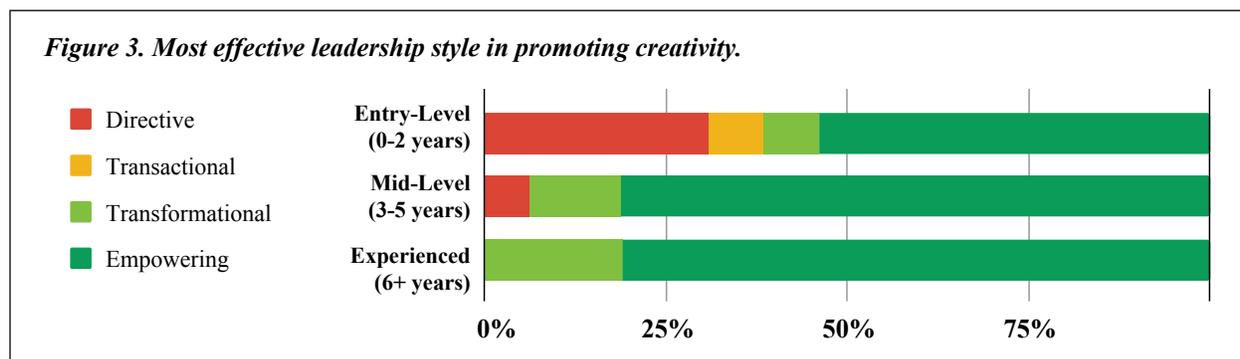


Leadership

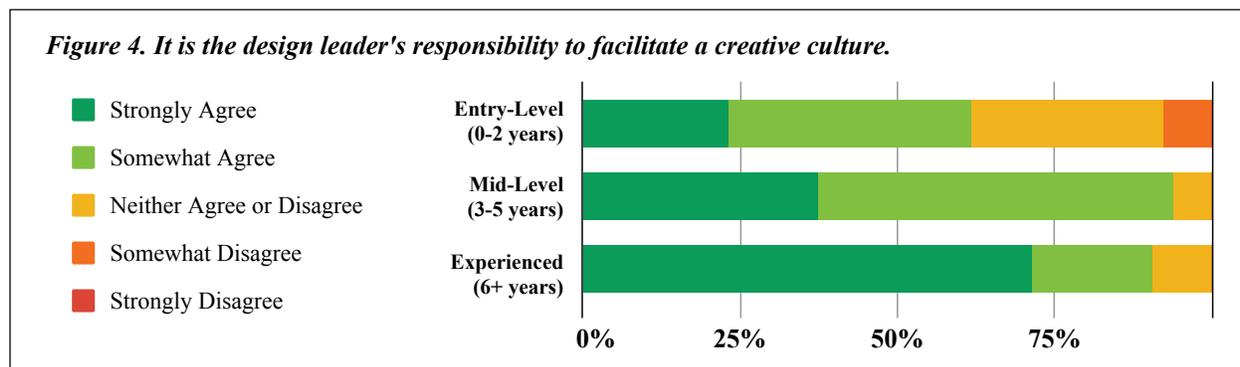
Overall, the majority of design leaders surveyed agreed that, while technical expertise gave them some of the skills necessary for design leadership, these skills alone did not prepare them for successful design leadership. The survey found a correlation between years of experience and the level with which a design leader believes this to be true. Results indicated that the longer a leader is in their role, the more they realize that technical expertise alone does not result in successful leadership. For example, over 69% of new design leaders surveyed believe that technical expertise alone fully prepared them for their leadership roles, while 81% of experienced design leaders believe that technical expertise provided them just some of the skills they needed for successful design leadership (see Figure 2).



The literature review revealed that an empowering leadership style is a significant driver of employee creativity. Survey results confirmed that the majority of design leaders agree that an empowering leadership style—over directive, transactional, and transformational—is the most effective style to use when working with graphic designers. The survey also found a correlation between years of experience and leadership style. Results indicated that the longer a leader is in their role, the more they find that an empowering leadership style is the most effective way to lead graphic designers. Eighty-one percent of experienced design leaders utilize an empowering leadership style as compared to just 54% of new design leaders (see Figure 3).



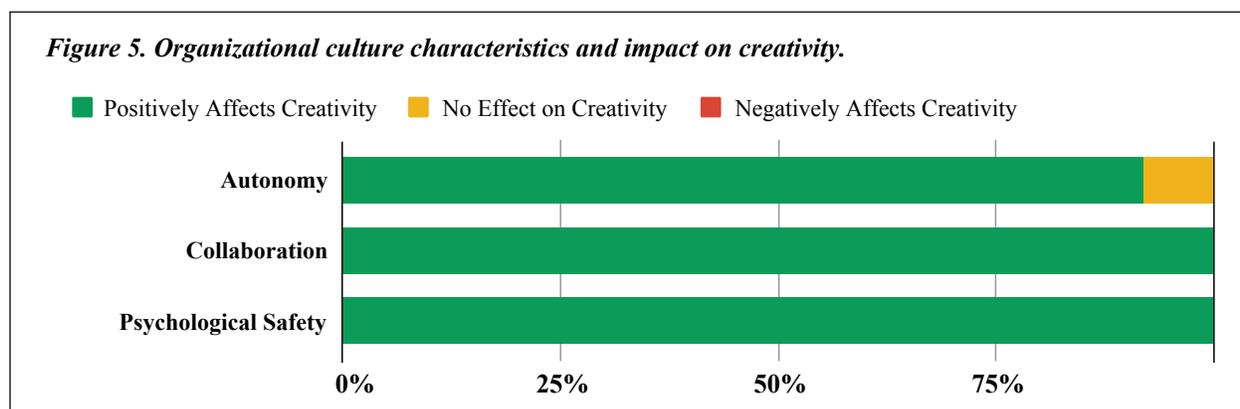
The survey also found a correlation between years of experience and a leader’s belief that they are responsible for facilitating the “creative culture”. Results indicated that the longer a leader is in their role, the more a design leader believes this to be true; over 90% of experienced design leaders agreed with this (see Figure 4).



The leadership section of the survey illuminates the problem statement that many new design leaders don't fully understand their roles as leaders. In fact, many new design leaders still believe their responsibilities are technical versus organizational, causing them to adopt directive leadership styles that result in employee powerlessness, an organizational characteristic that has been found to negatively impact creativity (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). The majority of new design leaders believe that formal design education and design experience will offer them the full set of tools they need for successful design leadership. The study shows that experiential learning will prove otherwise.

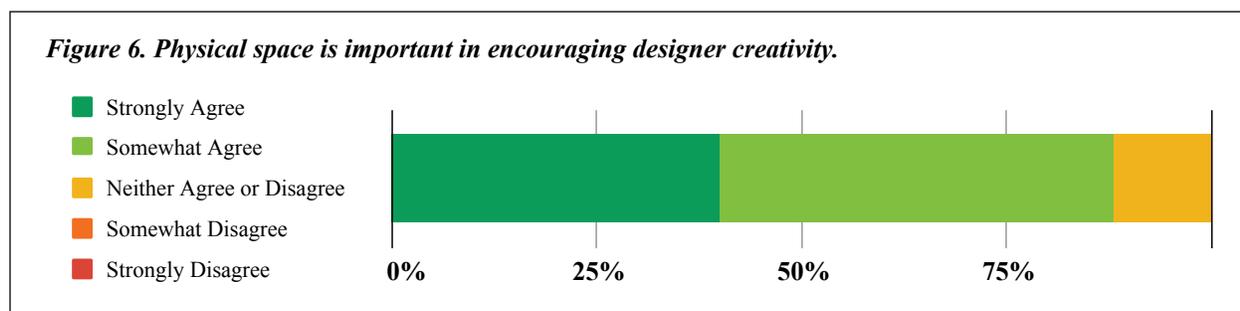
Organizational Culture

The survey results overwhelmingly confirmed the literature review's findings related to organizational culture. Over 90% of design leaders agreed that an autonomous work environment positively contributes to designer creativity, and 100% of survey respondents agreed that cultures that promote collaboration and psychological safety positively contribute to designer creativity (see Figure 5).

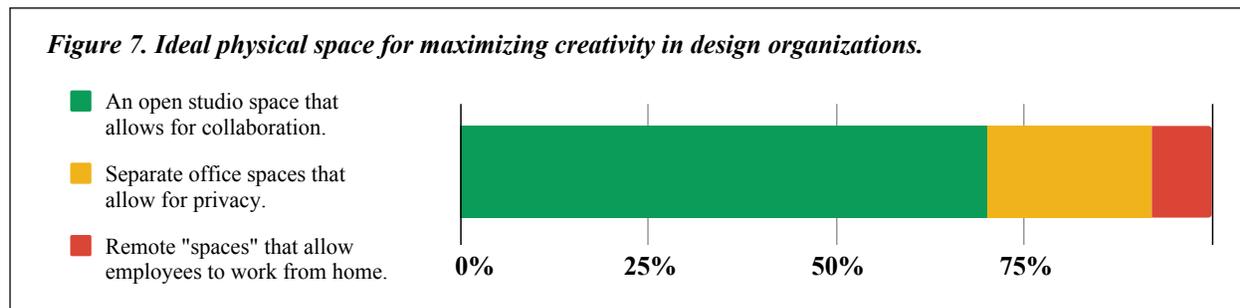


Organizational Support

The organizational support section of the survey addressed whether or not the opinions of design leaders were in alignment with the findings from the organizational support section of the literature review. Eighty-eight percent of survey participants agreed with the finding that physical space is important in encouraging designer creativity (see Figure 6).

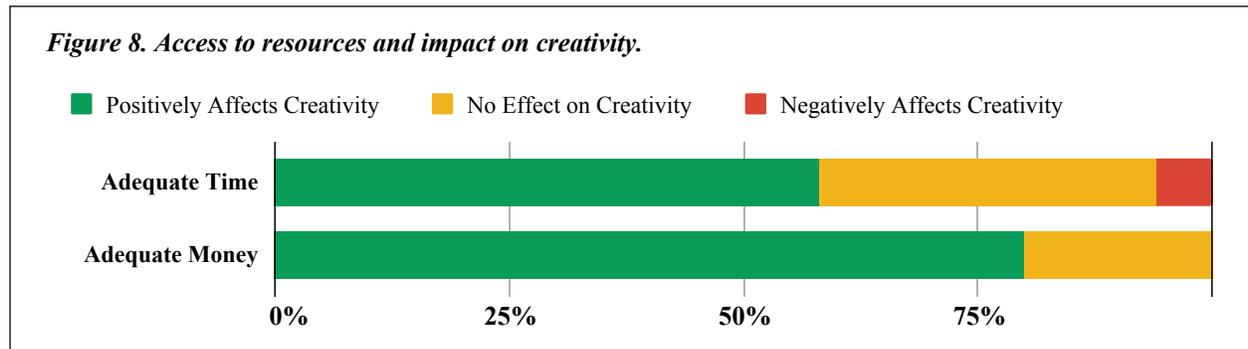


The literature review found that open studio spaces are ideal for design organizations. Open studio spaces encourage design team collaboration, an aspect of organizational culture that 100% of design leaders reported being positively connected to creativity. Seventy-percent of design leaders surveyed agreed that open studio spaces are ideal for design organizations (see Figure 7).

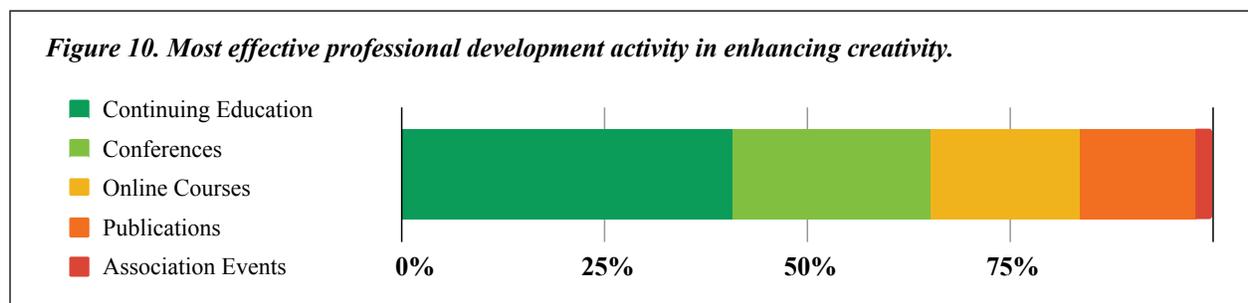
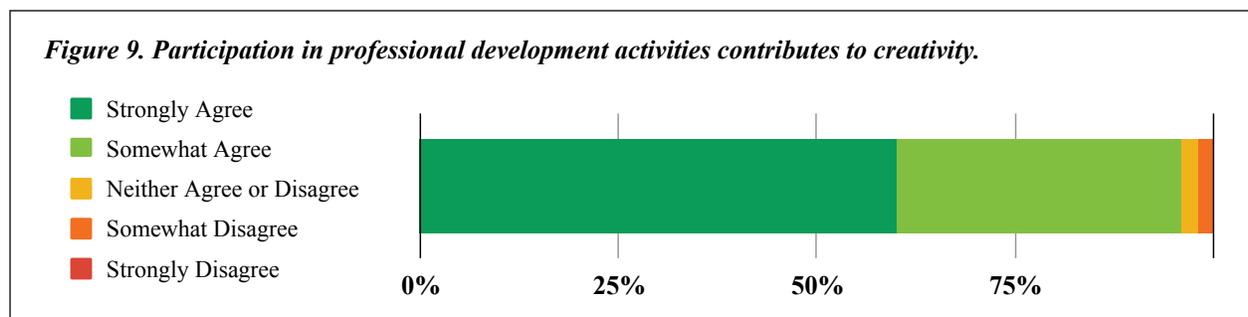


The survey results confirmed the literature review’s findings related to access to resources. Fifty-eight percent of design leaders agreed that providing designers adequate time to

get their work done within their scheduled hours positively contributed to creativity, and 80% of design leaders agreed that providing designers compensation that considers regional industry standards, cost of living, and experience positively contributes to creativity (see Figure 8).



The literature review revealed that a leader must invest in professional development opportunities if they want to fully support designers in their quest for creativity. Ninety-six percent of survey respondents agreed with this statement (see Figure 9). When asked to rate professional development activities in their ability to enhance designer creativity, the most popular responses were participation in continuing education, attendance at conferences, and completion of online courses (see Figure 10).



Conclusion

In order for graphic designers to be successful in their transitions into design leadership, they must understand that, while the skills they obtained during their time as graphic designers are critical to design leadership, these skills are just a few of the many skills required for successful design leadership. Successful design leadership will require the new design leader to trade in their technical skills for organizational skills—to shift from “having” creativity, to “cultivating” creativity.

The research and survey results presented in this paper revealed the leadership, organizational culture, and organizational support characteristics that have been found to have a positive effect on design team creativity. First, the research confirmed that an empowering leadership style which includes activities such as leading by example, coaching, participative decision-making, informing, and showing concern/interacting with the team, is a significant producer of designer creativity. Second, the research overwhelmingly confirmed that the facilitation of an organizational culture that (a) gives designers autonomy over their work, (b) allows designers to collaborate and discuss design challenges as a team, and (c) allows designers to share their work without fear of embarrassment or rejection, enhances designer creativity. Third, the research confirmed that supporting designers by ways of (a) configuring an open studio space that allows for collaboration, (b) offering adequate resources (i.e. time and money) so that designers are able to better focus on design work, and (c) investing in professional development opportunities—primarily continuing education, attendance at conferences, and completion of online courses—enhances designer creativity. The survey confirmed—through responses that were in conflict with researchers and experienced design leaders—the problem

statement that many new design leaders do not fully understand the role design leaders play in supporting creativity. By revealing the organizational components that researchers and experienced design leaders have found to be critical to successful design leadership, this research provides graphic designers with key insights necessary to reduce the adjustment period that occurs when they are promoted into design leadership roles.

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Appendix A

Survey: “Drawing Connections Between Design Leadership and Creativity”

Survey Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. The purpose of this survey is to explore leadership, organizational culture, and organizational support characteristics that have been found to influence design team creativity. By making these findings available to graphic designers in their transition into leadership roles, our hope is that new design leaders can more easily foster environments that result in highly-inspired, highly-creative teams. This survey takes an average of 5-10 minutes to complete.

Survey Qualification:

Have you read the consent form and do you agree to participate in the survey?

- Yes
- No*

**If you answered no, please do not continue this survey.*

Are you currently in a design leadership role that oversees the work of one or more designers?

- Yes
- No*

**If you answered no, please do not continue this survey.*

Demographics

To which gender identity do you most identify?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender Female
- Transgender Male
- Gender Variant / Non-Conforming
- Other: _____

What is your age range?

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65 years or older

Please specify your race/ethnicity. (Check all that apply)

- Asian
- Black or African American
- Caucasian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Middle Eastern
- Native American or American Indian
- Pacific Islander
- Other: _____

Design Leadership Experience

How many years have you been in a design leadership role?

- 0-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6 years or more

How many designers do you currently lead?

- 1 to 3
- 4 to 6
- 7 or more

Design Education and Technical Experience

Do you have expertise in design via formal design education?

- No, I do not have any formal design education.
- Yes, I have completed design-related coursework.
- Yes, I have a professional certificate in a design-related field.
- Yes, I have a bachelor's degree in a design-related field.
- Yes, I have a master's degree or higher in a design-related field.

Formal design education is critical to design leadership.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Prior to becoming a design leader, did you work as a designer?

- Yes
- No

How many years did you work as a designer, prior to becoming a leader?

- 0-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6 years or more

Former experience as a designer is critical to design leadership.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Select one statement that best describes you.

- Formal design education fully prepared me for design leadership.
- Prior experience as a designer fully prepared me for design leadership.
- Formal design education, combined with prior experience as a designer, fully prepared me for design leadership.
- While formal design education and prior experience as a designer gave me some of the skills necessary, these skills alone did not prepare me for design leadership.
- Neither formal design education nor prior experience as a designer gave me any of the skills I needed for design leadership.

Leadership:

Based on your experience, what is the most important role of a design leader?

- To ensure that design projects are completed accurately, on time, and within budget.
- To establish a structure that nurtures designers in their quest for creativity.
- To build and maintain relationships with clients, vendors, and executive leadership.

Based on your experience, which of these sets of leadership traits are the best drivers of employee creativity?

- Issuing instructions, assigning goals, and monitoring workloads.
- Providing personal rewards, material rewards, and managing by exception.
- Providing vision, idealism, inspirational communication, and performance expectations.
- Encouraging independent action, opportunity thinking, teamwork, self-development, and participative goal setting.

Organizational Culture:

It is the design leader's responsibility to facilitate a culture that allows for maximum creativity.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Based on your experience, select how each of the following characteristics of culture affects team creativity:

An environment that allows employees the freedom to do their work and determine procedures as they see fit within the guidelines provided. (Autonomous)

- Positively affects creativity
- No effect on creativity
- Negatively affects creativity

An environment where an emphasis is placed on following a standardized process; titles and hierarchy dictate responsibilities. (Non-Autonomous)

- Positively affects creativity
- No effect on creativity
- Negatively affects creativity

Employees share ideas and concepts without fear of embarrassment or rejection. (Psychological Safety)

- Positively affects creativity
- No effect on creativity
- Negatively affects creativity

Employees compete to achieve individual goals and are assessed against each other in creative performance. (Non-Psychological Safety)

- Positively affects creativity
- No effect on creativity
- Negatively affects creativity

Employees openly communicate, discuss design challenges, and explore solutions together. (Collaborative)

- Positively affects creativity
- No effect on creativity
- Negatively affects creativity

Employees work independently to complete design projects that have been assigned. (Non-Collaborative)

- Positively affects creativity
- No effect on creativity
- Negatively affects creativity

Organizational Support:

Physical space is important in encouraging creativity.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Based on your experience, what type of physical space has been most ideal in cultivating creativity?

- An open studio space that allows for collaboration.
- Separate office spaces that allow for privacy.
- Remote "spaces" that allow employees to work from home.

Based on your experience, select how access to each of the following resources affects team creativity:

Work is assigned based on the designer's ability to get the work done within their scheduled hours. (Adequate Time)

- Positively affects creativity
- No effect on creativity
- Negatively affects creativity

Work is assigned based on demand; the designer is expected to work overtime if the work cannot be completed within their scheduled hours. (Inadequate Time)

- Positively affects creativity
- No effect on creativity
- Negatively affects creativity

Designers are provided compensation that considers regional industry standards, cost of living, and experience. (Adequate Pay)

- Positively affects creativity
- No effect on creativity
- Negatively affects creativity

Designers are provided regional industry-standard compensation, even if it is insufficient for the cost of living. (Inadequate Pay)

- Positively affects creativity
- No effect on creativity
- Negatively affects creativity

Employee participation in professional development activities positively contributes to creativity.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Rank the following professional development activities in their ability to positively contribute to creativity (1=greatest contribution, 5=least contribution).

- _____ Attendance at conferences
- _____ Attendance at professional association events
- _____ Continuing education classes
- _____ Online courses (subscription or other)
- _____ Print and digital publications

Contact Information:

Please enter your email address if you wish to receive updates about this survey (leave blank if you wish to remain anonymous).

- Email Address _____

Appendix B

Consent Form

University of San Diego Institutional Review Board Research Participant Consent Form

For the research study entitled:
Drawing Connections Between Design Leadership and Creativity

I. Purpose of the research study

Nicholas Porter is a graduate student in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research study he is conducting. The purpose of this research study is to explore leadership, organizational culture, and organizational support characteristics that experienced design leaders have been found to positively influence design team creativity.

II. What you will be asked to do

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey that asks you questions about your experience and the leadership, organizational culture, and organizational support characteristics that you have found to have a positive effect on design team creativity.

Your participation in this study will take a total of 5-10 minutes.

III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts

This study involves no more risk than the risks you encounter in daily life.

IV. Benefits

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you helped researchers better understand the leadership, organizational culture, and organizational support characteristics that have been found to have a positive effect on design team creativity.

V. Confidentiality

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, not individually.

The information or materials you provide may be cleansed of all identifiers (like your name) and used in future research.

VI. Compensation

You will receive no compensation for your participation in the study.

VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on any benefits you're entitled to, like your health care, or your employment or grades. You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

VIII. Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact either:

1) Nick Porter

Email: nporter@sandiego.edu

Phone: (619) 260-4176

2) Antonio Jimenez-Luque

Email: ajimenezluque@sandiego.edu

Phone: (619) 260-4213

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Participant (**Printed**)

Signature of Investigator

Date