

Part 2 – What gets assessed

Part 1 of this guide described the territory covered by the Design Atlas audit tool and outlined how Design Atlas can be used to review design capability within an organisation.

Part 2 of the guide provides a detailed description of the questions that make up the Design Atlas framework. For each question a paragraph of background information is provided. A short description of evidence that could be accessed to help establish capability is also given. The levels of capability are then described in detail. At the end of this part of the guide a results sheet is provided onto which the score for all the Design Atlas questions can be recorded.

Planning for design

General planning awareness

Before asking questions about how effective a business is at planning for design it is useful to investigate general planning awareness. If a business does not have a clear understanding of where it is, where it is going and how it is going to get there it will be difficult to understand the role that design could play in delivering strategic development. The general planning awareness questions examine the extent of planning and the sources of information that drive the planning process.

Evidence that might be accessed

- Evidence of a business plan
- General questioning of business planning activity: How is this done? Who is involved? How is this updated? What sources of information are used to inform the business planning process?

How effective is the business at planning across all its activities?

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Level 1 | There is no evidence of business planning (Day to day activities take priority) |
| Level 2 | Plans are developed but do not reflect all business areas (i.e. mainly sales objectives) with no analysis of internal and external factors |
| Level 3 | Plans and objectives exist which set direction for the company and integrate the activities of all the company functions, based on limited analysis of internal and external factors |
| Level 4 | Planning is a dynamic process that drives the business, is led by analysis of internal and external drivers and leads to plans and objectives for all the company functions |

Planning for design

General planning communication

Even if a business creates well-grounded business plans their effectiveness will be dependent on clear communication to all those involved in implementation. This is an important issue, particularly where design is involved, as many individuals across an organisation will have a role to play in implementing plans and ensuring objectives are delivered. The general planning communication question explores the level of communication across the business.

Evidence that might be accessed

- Existing communication channels, meetings, newsletters, workshops, websites, general discussion – how effectively are business plans communicated through these routes?
- General questioning of communication routes throughout the business. How does the business ensure everybody understand the overall strategic direction of the business?

Are plans and objectives communicated clearly to all relevant company staff?

Level 1	Plans and objectives exist only in the minds of one or two key individuals
Level 2	Plans and objectives are discussed in an unstructured way within the management team
Level 3	Plans and objectives are communicated in a structured way within the management team
Level 4	Plans and objectives are communicated widely with all company staff receiving relevant information updated on an appropriate basis

Planning for design

Design Planning Awareness

A business will often describe its corporate objectives in terms of growth targets and the development of new markets, new technologies or new alliances etc. Whatever the objectives design will have an important part to in achieving success. This question asks about the way in which the role of design is articulated within the business plan. Has the business identified how design will help it achieve its corporate objectives?

Evidence that might be accessed

- The company's business plan – does it articulate the role design will play in strategic development
- General questioning of business planning activity: Has the business identified the strategies it will use to deliver its objectives? Is design included as part of these strategic plans?

Does the business understand where design (i.e. the creation of products environments and identity/brand) fits in with its overall corporate plans and how design can be used to deliver corporate objectives?

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Level 1 | Company plans and objectives do not mention the use of design (or any other word describing equivalent design activity) |
| Level 2 | Company plans mention the use of design, but do not define objectives for design |
| Level 3 | Company plans identify objectives for design but with limited analysis of products, customers, markets and competitors |
| Level 4 | Company plans identify clear objectives for design activity with full and updated understanding of the company position relative to products, customers, markets and competitors |

Planning for design

Design Planning Thinking

Business plans can be developed in an informal way based solely on intuition. Alternatively techniques can be used to help bring a degree of objectivity to the process. These might help in the gathering and sorting of external information or they might be structured methods for identifying potential solutions. This question examines the extent of structured thinking used when considering design activity.

Evidence that might be accessed

- Is there any evidence of planning techniques within the business?
- General questioning of business planning activity: Does the business use any tools and techniques when creating business plans? Are any of these used to clarify the role of design in future strategic development?

What use is made of structured thinking when developing, organising and communicating design plans and objectives?

Level 1	No structured thinking is used when setting plans and objectives for design
Level 2	Plans and objectives for design are set after structured discussion (for example a meeting with an agenda)
Level 3	Appropriate individual tools are used to help develop and organise design plans and objectives
Level 4	The business uses a broad range of approaches when structuring thinking with complete internal understanding of appropriate tools and techniques

Planning for design

Design Planning Horizons

Plans by their very nature focus on the future. When considering design investment a long term view is particularly important, if a business is making one off design investments in response to individual business needs then opportunities for building a coherent product range or clearly articulated brand will be lost. If the business can take a long-term view and begin to make predictions about future design needs opportunities for greater synergy will be created.

Evidence that might be accessed

- The company's business plan – how far into the future does this articulate business plans?
- General questioning of business planning activity: How far into the future does the business think when planning activity? For example, does the business consider future product generations when planning the next product?

How focused and forward thinking are the company's plans for design?

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Level 1 | Design is considered in the short-term to deliver an individual business objective |
| Level 2 | Design is considered in the short-term as a means of delivering on several business objectives |
| Level 3 | Design is considered in the short-term and medium term as a means of delivering on several business objectives |
| Level 4 | Design is considered as an integral part of all short, medium and long term business objectives |

Processes for design

General Process Awareness

Before considering the design process in operation within a business it is useful to consider the level of process thinking across all business activities. Sometimes a business will only recognise more 'physical' activities such as production as processes. In other organisations 'non physical' aspects of business activity have been identified as being a process, for example the process of ensuring quality in all business operations. If a business does not consider any of its activities to be a process it will be difficult to identify where design might fit within the business.

Evidence that might be accessed

- Is there physical evidence of activities within the business being described as processes?
- General questioning of process thinking within the business: What activities does the business think of as being processes? How does it go about identifying these processes?

Does the business understand how its activities can be managed and improved if they are identified as processes?

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Level 1 | The business does not recognise any of its activities as processes |
| Level 2 | The business recognises some of its more 'physical' activities as processes (e.g. production & purchasing) |
| Level 3 | The business has identified processes within a majority of its activities |
| Level 4 | The business has identified processes and is actively engaged in their continuous improvement |

Processes for design

Design process awareness

Having examined the level of general process awareness within the business it is useful to explore perceptions of the design process. In some organisations this has been clearly identified generally being described as a series of activities starting with the initial idea for a new product, service, working environment or communications material, moving through to full implementation as a design solution. Sometimes the design process forms part of another broader business process, for example new product development or brand management and development.

Evidence that might be accessed

- Is there a design process(es) within the business? What does it look like? How is it recorded?
- General questioning of design process activity: Does the business have an understanding of the process associated with its existing or planned design activity? Does the business continuously improve its design process?

Does the business understand where design fits within its processes?

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Level 1 | The business has no awareness of where design fits within current processes |
| Level 2 | The business has some understanding of where design might contribute within current processes |
| Level 3 | The business has complete understanding of where design can be built into existing processes |
| Level 4 | Having integrated design into its existing portfolio of business processes the company is actively engaged in continuous design process improvement |

Processes for design

Design process management

A business will maximise its return on design investment if it manages design activity effectively. This involves monitoring the resources that are being invested in design activity and tracking time scales to ensure projects proceed according to plan. Managing the design process also requires careful monitoring of design requirements throughout the design project, usually through review meetings. Care has to be taken to ensure these are effectively established at the beginning of design activity and are used to direct the development of design solutions.

Evidence that might be accessed

- Evidence of design project management. For example, outputs from review meetings, design briefs, time plans etc.
- General questioning of design project activity: Does the business hold review meetings to monitor design project activity? How does the business manage design requirements? Does the business establish clear design briefs at the start of design projects?

Does the business understand how design activity can be managed?

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Level 1 | The business has no mechanisms or experience in managing design |
| Level 2 | The business uses informal undocumented mechanisms for establishing and monitoring costs, time scales and design requirements within design projects |
| Level 3 | The business uses documentation in establishing and monitoring costs, time scales and design requirements within design projects through regular reviews |
| Level 4 | The business has established procedures for risk managing design projects through regular reviews and is actively engaged in streamlining and improving these mechanisms |

Processes for design

Design process thinking

When actually undertaking design projects large amounts of information must be gathered and sorted to help inform the design process. Creative and innovate solutions need to be generated in response to design requirements and design solutions must then be implemented as effectively as possible to maintain competitiveness. A variety of techniques can be used to support these activities. This question examines the extent of structured thinking used when undertaking design projects.

Evidence that might be accessed

- Outputs from tools and techniques. For example checklist for establishing design briefs.
- General questioning of design project activity: How are decisions made during the design process? What information is used to inform decision-making? Has this information been collated using a structured technique?

What use is made of structured thinking when gathering, processing and evaluating information within the design process?

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Level 1 | No structured thinking is used when undertaking design activity |
| Level 2 | Design information is gathered, processed and evaluated through structured discussion (for example a meeting with an agenda) |
| Level 3 | Appropriate individual tools are used to help process and evaluate design information |
| Level 4 | The company uses a broad range of approaches when structuring thinking with complete internal understanding of appropriate tools and techniques |

Resources for design

General Budget Allocation

Before asking questions about the resources that are in place within a business for funding design project activity it is useful to examine the general principles of budget allocation within the business. If an organisation does not have procedures in place for assigning budgets to projects or for tracking return on investment it will be difficult to ring fence the funding required to undertake activities such as design.

Evidence that might be accessed

- Evidence of budgets having been prepared in the past.
- General questioning of resource allocation activity: How does the business decide which areas of activity it should invest in? What procedures are in place to evaluate investment decisions?

Does the business understand the general principles of budget allocation?

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Level 1 | There is no evidence of financial planning and budget allocation for any activity within the business |
| Level 2 | The business allocates budgets to project activities but with no review of potential returns |
| Level 3 | Budgets are allocated on the basis of potential return with a limited number of financial procedures in place to help assist in investment decision making |
| Level 4 | Budgets are allocated on the basis of potential return with financial procedures in place to help assist in appraising investments, assessing risk and tracking returns. |

Resources for design

Design Budget Allocation

Design activity requires investment. If a business does not have an understanding of the funding required to develop and implement a design solution then design activity will be compromised. If a business has procedures in place it will be able to identify the design investment required alongside the potential payback. It will be able to account for the impact of design in both the short term and the long term and will understand both the quantitative and qualitative benefits that can accrue from design.

Evidence that might be accessed

- Evidence of budgets having been prepared to support design investment in the past
- General questioning of resource allocation activity: How does the business decide how much should be invested in design activity? What procedures are in place to evaluate design investment decisions?

Is the business able to assign resources to design activity?

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Level 1 | The business is unable to understand the potential of design investment and is unwilling to commit resources to design activity |
| Level 2 | The business is able to understand the potential of design and assign funding but with no review of potential returns |
| Level 3 | Budgets are allocated to design activity on the basis of potential return with a limited number of financial procedures in place to assist in decision making |
| Level 4 | Budgets are allocated to design activity on the basis of potential return with financial procedures in place to help assist in appraising design investment, assessing risk and tracking returns. |

People for design

Design Skills

Effective design requires people with experience and skills in many areas of activity. For example, graphic design, website design, industrial design, interface design, lighting and interior design. A business can harness design skills by building an appropriate team of expertise internally and/or by working with a team of relevant external consultants. Whatever approach is taken it is important that the selected designers have the right skills and experience. Even when an external design team undertakes a project, experience and understanding is required internally in order to handle the design activity effectively.

Evidence that might be accessed

- What design skills do internal staff have? What design skills do people associated with the business have?
- General questioning of understanding of design skills: How does the business decide who should undertake design activity? How does the business access external design expertise? How does the business recruit and nurture internal design skills?

Does the business have the skills to handle design activity?

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Level 1 | Skills do not exist within the business to handle design activity either internally or through an external designer |
| Level 2 | Experience exists within the business for handling some forms of design activity either internally or through an external designer |
| Level 3 | The business has experience in handling all relevant forms of design activity, either internally or through an external designer, there is however little development of these abilities. |
| Level 4 | The business has experience in handling all relevant forms of design activity, this capability is enhanced with regular development of skills |

People for design

Design Organisation

Organising design activities to accommodate the wide range of contributions required to produce an effective design solution requires careful thought. An organisational approach is required that suits the culture of both the internal and potential external participants in design activity. This might mean building a project team specifically for a project or finding an appropriate way to release staff from day to day responsibilities to engage in design projects.

Evidence that might be accessed

- Evidence of organisational charts or organisational procedures for the business
- General questioning of how design is organised: How does the business ensure the appropriate people meet at the right time during the design process? What communication mechanisms are in place within the business and its design team?

Does the business organise its design activities to accommodate the wide range of contributions required to produce an effective design solution?

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Level 1 | No provision is made to bring relevant contributions together at appropriate points during design activity |
| Level 2 | The business has arrangements for bringing internal contributions together at appropriate points during design activity |
| Level 3 | The business has arrangements for bringing internal and external contributions together at appropriate points during design activity |
| Level 4 | The business makes appropriate arrangements to bring internal and external contributions together and ensures this information is used to drive design activity |

Culture for design

Design Commitment

The initiation, development and implementation of a design solution requires commitment from across a business. As with most activities the attitude of senior staff is fundamental to success. Senior management have an important role to play in making timely decisions during the design process. They must also act as champions of design within the business explaining the benefits of appropriate design investment to both internal and external audiences.

Evidence that might be accessed

- General questioning of management commitment: Who are the champions of design activity within the business? How senior are they within the business? Do management think of the business as being design driven?

How committed are senior management within the company to design activity?

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Level 1 | It is difficult to obtain interest and commitment from senior management to important design decisions |
| Level 2 | Senior management demonstrate some interest in design with individual projects and will make key decisions about design activity but with frequent delays |
| Level 3 | Senior management are enthusiastic about design within individual projects and will make key decisions about design activity with minimum of delay |
| Level 4 | Senior management champion the role of design in developing all aspects of the business, they are effective in decision making and are continuously seeking to improve communication and decision making channels |

Culture for design

Design Attitudes

Design investment will succeed when everybody within a business has bought into its importance to the firm. At some point most employees will be involved in the implementation of design solutions, whether they be a new product, website or working environment. It is important therefore that the working culture within the business is receptive to design ideas and understands the contribution that they will make to the company's future.

Evidence that might be accessed

When staff are quizzed about design, how positive are they about design investment? Do staff think of the business as being design driven? What responsibility have staff been given to implement design decisions?

How positive are attitudes to design within the business?

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Level 1 | Design is viewed as a cost rather than as an investment by a majority of employees |
| Level 2 | Design investment is tolerated as a necessary evil by most employees, but is always seen as someone else's responsibility |
| Level 3 | A majority of employees recognise that design investment is important and are willing to contribute to the development and implementation of design solutions within the business |
| Level 4 | Everyone in the business understands that investment in design is essential and works as a team to champion design in all business activities |

Design Atlas results sheet

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<i>General planning awareness</i> How effective is the business at planning across all its activities?				
<i>General planning communication</i> Are plans and objectives communicated clearly to all relevant company staff?				
<i>Design planning awareness</i> Does the business understand where design fits within its overall corporate plans?				
<i>Design planning thinking</i> What use is made of structured thinking in developing design plans?				
<i>Design planning horizons</i> How focused and forward thinking are design plans				
<i>General process awareness</i> Is their understanding of how activities can be identified as processes?				
<i>Design process awareness</i> Does the business understand where design fits within its processes?				
<i>Design process management</i> Does the business understand how design activity can be managed?				
<i>Design process tools</i> What use is made of structured thinking in design activity?				
<i>General resource allocation</i> Does the business understand the general principles of budget allocation				
<i>Design resource allocation</i> Is the business able to assign resources to design activity?				
<i>Design skills</i> Does the business have the skills to handle design activity				
<i>Design organisation</i> Does the business accommodate the multi-disciplinary nature of design activity?				
<i>Design commitment</i> How committed are senior management to design activity?				
<i>Design attitudes</i> How positive are attitudes to design?				

Part 3 – Responding to findings

In Part 1 of this guide the process for using the Design Atlas framework within an organisation is outlined. In Part 2 of the guide the Design Atlas questions are detailed.

This final part of the guide describes recommendations for design capability development that can be made in response to the Design Atlas findings. These are presented in a tabular form.

Responding to Design Atlas findings – Planning for design

General planning awareness

If general planning awareness is low within a business the overall business plan should be developed before attention is paid to design planning. This might require training in the preparation of business plans or assistance from an external advisor. Even when business planning awareness is high there will always be room for improvement, for example making the process more dynamic, improving methods used for analysing internal and external factors. Again training or external advice will often be helpful in bringing this expertise into the business

General planning communication

Communication is central to effective implementation of all plans. If this area is low scoring effort must be put into improving communication. This might be achieved by examining the way information flows through the organisation and then changing the style of management or altering the frequency and participation at meetings. Investment in the design of working environments and internal communication routes, such as the intranet, will all potentially improve general planning communication.

Design planning awareness

Many businesses have not realised the role design can play in delivering business objectives. If awareness in this area is low a business can benefit from being shown appropriate examples of how design could help deliver business objectives. Useful case studies demonstrating the impact of design investment are available on the Design Council website.
www.designcouncil.org.uk

Design planning thinking

It can be difficult to organise and discuss design plans unless some form of structured thinking is being used within the business. There are many tools and techniques that can be implemented to raise capability in this area. Some of these are described in chapter 11 of the Design in Business book associated with this website. These could be introduced as part of planning procedures within the company. Alternatively the company might choose to work with external consultants offering design-planning expertise.

Design planning horizons

In order to improve an organisation's design planning horizons new ways of working need to be introduced to the planning team. Again some of the tools described in the Design in Business textbook chapter 11 could be accessed and implemented within the business.

Responding to Design Atlas findings – Processes for design

General process awareness

If general business awareness is low it will be very unlikely that the business will understand processes such as design. Time might be well spent establishing fundamental processes within the business such as purchasing or order processing before examining the design process. Advice can be sought from external advisors on how to establish these processes. The internal team could be trained to identify, record and improve business processes; alternatively external consultants can be used to guide the activity within an organisation.

Design process awareness

If a business wants to improve its capability in the area of design process it needs to understand what its existing design process looks like and how it might be improved. Bringing the design team together to map the process used in existing or past projects is an excellent way of starting this. The design process mapping methodology referenced in Chapter 11 of the Design in Business describes how to do this. Whenever the business completes a design project it is important that the design team reflect on the problems and successes associated with the design process. In this way opportunities for process improvement can be identified on a continuous basis.

Design process management

In order to rectify a low score for design process management a business needs to implement some form of design project planning and review. Appropriate software could be introduced to the organisation for planning and tracking the progress of design projects. In addition the business could introduce more systematic review meetings into future projects.

Design process tools

There are many techniques that will enhance thinking during design activity. It can be difficult to introduce these effectively and raise the capability in this area unless there is an established design process within the business. In the Book Design in Business a variety of these tools are either described or referenced. Individuals from the business could attend training courses in the use of these tools. Alternatively learning could be experiential through direct application on a live project.

Responding to Design Atlas findings – Resources, People and culture for design

General resource allocation

If a business is poor at assigning resources to any form of project activity it is unlikely that it will be in a position to support design investment effectively. Advice should be given to the business about business planning and resource allocation in a general sense before money is spent on design. This can be achieved through engaging external advice or by training of staff.

Design resource allocation

Businesses can be poor at assigning resources to design activity when the impact of that investment is unclear. It can be useful to explain to a business both the short term and long term benefits that might accrue from design investment in both tangible and intangible terms. The Design in Business textbook contains a chapter providing advice on design investment decisions.

Design skills

If the business has no access to suitable design expertise consideration needs to be given to in-house development of expertise or partnership with external design agencies. Information on local design agencies should be available from regional business support agencies such as Business Links, Scottish Enterprise, the Northern Ireland Design Directorate and Welsh Design

Design organisation

The business may have limited experience of team working. Establishing the design process being used within the organisation can be a very useful start point in identifying ways to improve the organisation of design projects.

Design commitment

A low commitment to design activity from senior staff should ring alarm bells. Priority should be given to establishing this commitment; this might be achieved by presenting information given in the tools section of the Design Council website. Success will usually help build commitment undertaking a well thought through pilot design project, can often be useful

Design attitudes

Staff attitudes can only be influenced over a period of time. Discussion and debate can be very effective ways of developing a positive approach towards design. Getting staff involved in the design process and implementation of ideas will also benefit attitudes towards design

