

wonderful focus and intensity of activity that brings people together extremely effectively and nowhere is this more powerfully demonstrated than in the design project. Much recent mid-career management training has been based around the 'away-day' and the project as ways of building teams and collaborative practices. However in the design office the danger seems to be the reverse. The design team has become such an obvious organisational structure that most design offices put nearly all their resource into these teams. This leaves little effort for the conscious reflective thinking that might more easily enable knowledge to be transferred between projects.

Thus the group or team in design can be both a force for enhancing creative thinking within the project and yet also a force for separating out projects and thus an obstacle to learning and developing the organisation as a whole.

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15

Design as conversation and perception

Language can become a screen that stands between the thinker and reality. That is the reason why true creativity starts where language ends.

Arthur Koestler

a reflective conversation with the situation

Donald Schön

In this chapter we shall look at design as a process based on conversation and perception. In essence this means how designers come to understand problems and get ideas about solutions through a process that is conversation-like. A process that involves changing the way the situation is perceived by 'talking it through'. As the designer Kenneth Grange put it 'you do have to ferret around . . . to find that which is then suddenly obvious to you' (Cross 2001a).

In a professional context design is very often progressed by teams or groups as we saw in the previous chapter. Sometimes there are teams of designers from the same professional background usually because a job is too large or complex to be handled by one person. Sometimes the nature of the object being created involves many specialist areas and requires a multi-professional design team. In both such cases the design progresses at least partly through the conversations that take place between these team members. Normally such conversations are not recorded and so their importance as part of the process has consequently been rather underestimated in much design research. That these conversations are indeed important