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Design as Possibility

A Philosophy of Organizational Architecture

Abstract

This essay outlines the design philosophy underpinning Division Group's transformation services, grounded in the foundational principles of Managing as Designing by Boland and Collopy. It presents design not as a visual or procedural enhancement, but as a strategic and human-centered discipline—one that integrates imagination, purpose, emotional resonance, and organizational form. Drawing on concepts such as emotional architecture, iterative inquiry, and co-creation, the essay explores how Division Group helps organizations navigate complexity, embody their values, and design futures that are both functional and meaningful.

1. Introduction

In a world where complexity, ambiguity, and disruption define the organizational landscape, design is no longer a luxury—it is a necessity. At Division Group, we do not treat design as an aesthetic overlay or isolated phase. We treat it as a strategic discipline: a means of creating coherence, purpose, and movement. Our philosophy is grounded in the foundational insight of Managing as Designing¹—that management, at its most effective, is a design practice. It is the act of shaping form, meaning, and experience in ways that enable organizations to become more fully themselves.

2. Design as Organizational Authors

Boland and Collopy argue that while traditional management emphasizes analysis and optimization, design is about invention. It does not ask what is, but what could be. At Division Group, our design services begin with this premise: that every organization holds the potential for transformation not through control, but through creation. We work with

clients not to tweak structures, but to co-author new forms—structures that reflect evolving identities, express purpose, and invite collective pride.

3. Design as Emotional Architecture

Drawing inspiration from architecture and human-centered design, we approach transformation as both functional and symbolic. Every system, process, and cultural ritual we help shape is infused with intention. It must work—but it must also speak. It must express the values, rhythms, and aspirations of those who inhabit it. This is what we call emotional architecture: the fusion of strategic clarity with symbolic depth. As Gehry suggests in *Managing as Designing*², great design holds ambiguity and form in dynamic tension—a philosophy deeply embedded in our practice.

4. Design as Inquiry and Iteration

Our work is not formulaic. It is iterative, emergent, and co-creative. Like Liedtka, we view design as a form of hypothesis testing³. We enter each engagement not with answers, but with curiosity and the tools to explore possible futures. We help leadership teams ask better questions, challenge constraints, and test assumptions in the form of tangible design artifacts—organizational blueprints, governance models, cultural prototypes, and collaborative frameworks. In doing so, we transform complexity into clarity.

5. Designing for Meaning and Movement

Design, as we understand it, is not about static form—it is about generative possibility. We do not simply facilitate change; we choreograph experiences that carry meaning and generate sustained energy. Our process makes space for emotion, ambiguity, and culture. It invites leaders to design not just strategies, but environments where teams can thrive, where values are made visible, and where structures enable—not inhibit—human potential.

6. Conclusion: Shaping What Could Be

To design is to lead with imagination. It is to shape not just what is seen, but what is sensed and lived. At Division Group, design is our way of helping organizations become more intentional, more human, and more courageous. It is not a step in the process—it is the process. We do not manage by control. We design by conviction.

Keywords

organizational design, design thinking, human-centered transformation, emotional architecture, Managing as Designing, Boland and Collopy, Division Group, strategic change, iterative design, leadership by design

References

¹ Boland, R. J., & Collopy, F. (Eds.). (2004). *Managing as designing*. Stanford University Press.

² Gehry, F. (2004). Reflections on designing and architectural practice. In R. J. Boland & F. Collopy (Eds.), *Managing as designing* (pp. 19–35). Stanford University Press.

³ Liedtka, J. (2000). Linking design thinking with innovation outcomes through cognitive bias reduction. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 32(6), 925–938. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12163>

Disclosure

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