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## **Meaningful moments at work: Frames evoked by in-house and consultancy designers**

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*Design is increasingly recognised as a competitive advantage for companies, but we know relatively little of the activities and perceptions of designers in different organisational contexts. Based on 69 semi-structured interviews with 34 in-house and 35 consultancy designers, this study investigates the type and framing of 291 reported meaningful moments. We found different dominant experience frames in the two organisational contexts with different connections to motivation. On the other hand, most meaningful moments in both organisations were related to the social context and implications rather than the design activities themselves. The results highlight professional design being an inherently social and contextual activity, urging more research to take an organisationally situated perspective to design.*

Keywords: framing; sense-making; design practice; psychology of design; motivation

Design is increasingly recognised as a competitive advantage for companies (Magalhães 2018). As the scope of design broadens to more holistic and strategic levels in organisations, the variety of stakeholders that designers need to successfully engage with broadens (Pierri 2017). However, we know relatively little of how activities and perceptions of designers differ in various organisational contexts of design (Nielsen 2017). The few studies that have explored the perspectives of designers themselves have found noted differences between the perceptions of design and roles taken by designers, in relation to how designers connect their understanding of design to their actions (Daly et al. 2012), how they experience cross-disciplinary design practice (Adams et al. 2011) or how they use art, engineering and business rhetoric (Liu and Hinds 2012).

Aligning with the rise of more situated design research (Lloyd and Oak 2018), framing and reframing have recently attracted much attention as a key feature of design practice (McDonnell 2018; Paton and Dorst 2011). In essence, framing is a way to make sense of ('frame') situations or experiences, selecting which aspects of complex and uncertain features are attended to (Schön 1983). However, most framing studies to date have focused on how design problems and solutions are framed (Lloyd and Oak 2018; McDonnell 2018).

The current paper proceeds to extend the concept of framing to the organisational experience of designers, investigating what types of events designers perceive as meaningful moments and how these moments are framed. We view frames as sense-making of experiences, with the designers rarely being fully cognisant of the frames they evoke. As McDonnell (2018, 75) states: 'calling upon the concept of framing does not imply frame awareness on the part of those engaged in it.' We create a framework for perceived value in the designers' experiences by combining the perspectives of intrinsic motivation (the three innate needs in self-determination theory [Ryan and Deci 2000]) and external justifications (the six orders of worth [Boltanski and Thévenot 2006]) to examine self-selected critical incidents reported by 69 designers in two different organisations. Ultimately, we hope to contribute towards understanding how organisations shape designers' work and vice versa.

### **Theoretical Framework For Examining Meaningful Moments**

In order to analyse what designers consider meaningful professional experiences and how they frame these, we adopt a framework combining internal psychological needs and social sense-making in the form of two theories: self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2000) and orders of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). This is by no means the only possible framework for these experiences, nor do we claim designers

themselves are aware of these frames, rather our framework serves as a scaffold for examining the perceived value in the experiences reported by designers.

Self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2000, 2017) offers an inside-out perspective on meaningful moments. This widely used theory focuses on the social and contextual conditions that enhance intrinsic self-motivation, where motivation arises from the experience itself, rather than from external rewards, punishments or instrumental goals connected to the experience (Ryan and Deci 2000). Self-determination theory identifies three innate, universal psychological needs that energise, direct and motivate (Deci and Vansteenkiste 2004):

- (1) *autonomy*: having volition, agency, and a sense of choice, being able to make decisions regarding one's actions and circumstances;
- (2) *competence*: mastering skills, overcoming challenges and having an impact on one's environment;
- (3) *relatedness*: interacting with and connecting to others in a meaningful way.

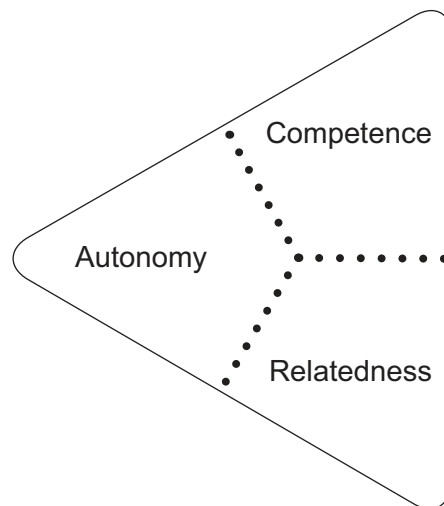


Figure 1. Three innate, universal psychological needs from self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2000)

These basic needs have been found relevant for work experiences in a wide range of

occupations and professions (e.g. Jungert et al. 2018). Satisfying the needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness is connected to wellbeing, job satisfaction and profitability alike at the workplace (Deci et al. 2017). While the theory has received some criticism on its emphasis on autonomy (sometimes misunderstood as individualism and detachment, rather than choice as originally intended) and intrinsic motivation, all three innate needs have been found to apply in cultures around the world (Deci et al. 2017) and intrinsic motivation fits creative work well, as the necessary behaviours can be hard to predict and script in advance (Devloo et al. 2014).

We combine this perspective of innate needs to how such experiences are made sense of interpersonally. Orders of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) take an outside-in view on meaningful moments, examining how people critique and justify their experiences to others (Jensen 2018). Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) identified six ‘orders of worth’: generalised combinations of coherent moral principles through which actors explain experiences. In these six worlds, legitimisation takes place through distinct principles of worth (Denis et al. 2007):

- (1) *inspired*: valuing spontaneity, creativity and imagination;
- (2) *domestic*: valuing tradition and hierarchy;
- (3) *opinion*: valuing reputation or esteem (also called ‘fame’ or ‘reputation’);
- (4) *civic*: valuing justice and solidarity, putting collective above individual interests;
- (5) *market*: valuing competition and individual desires (also ‘merchant’);
- (6) *industrial*: valuing efficiency and productivity.

While the addition of other worlds, such as green or project-based worlds, has been suggested, none have become as well-established as the six original orders (Blok 2013). Analysing rhetoric that design professionals choose to use when talking about their daily experiences in an organisation provides insight into how their legitimacy attempts

interact with strategies at various levels and how they relate themselves to the organisation (Denis et al. 2007).

Combining the different innate needs and interpersonal orders of justification provides a nuanced framework for examining the value framed in meaningful experiences of professional designers. The presence or lack of any innate need influencing a designer's intrinsic motivation can be justified through any order or worth, giving additional insight into how designers make sense of their experiences through a framework with of 18 categories (combining the three innate needs with the six orders of justification, Figure 2).

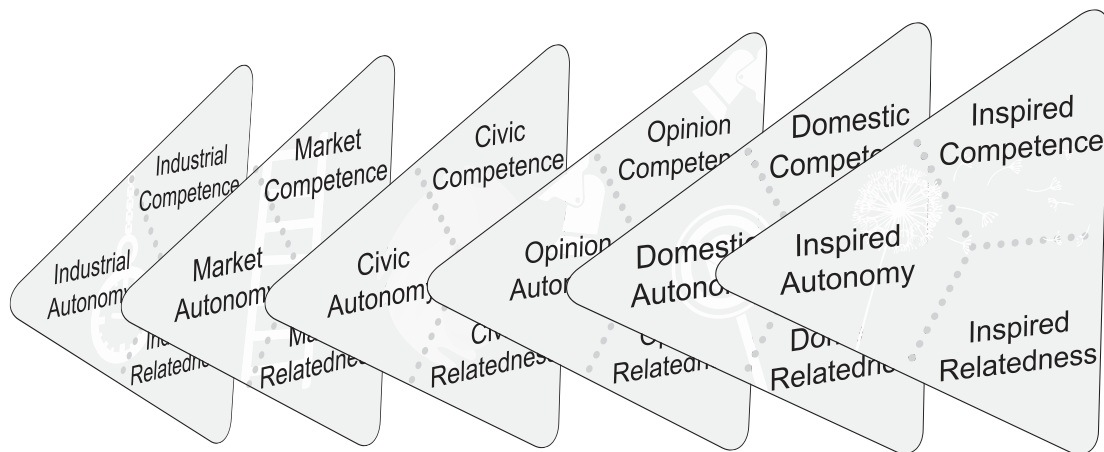


Figure 2. Our framework combining three innate needs (Ryan and Deci 2000) and six different orders of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006)

## Method

Aiming to investigate what professional designers experience as meaningful moments and how they frame these moments, semi-structured interviews were conducted with designers working at two organisations - a large technology company and a design consultancy. Designers' descriptions of their top and bottom moments at these companies were analysed using our combined framework.

### ***Research Setting And Participants***

Two case companies were selected as research sites, each encompassing diversity in design specialisations, projects and locations, yet operating predominately in technology-driven contexts: a globally-operating technology company with over 100.000 employees and a design consultancy with studios in several countries, serving many large technology company customers.

In both organisations, interview requests were sent to all designers in the organisation (except for engineers working in product design in the large technology company). Participation was voluntary and confidential, and a total of 37 in-house designers and 35 design consultants chose to take part in the study. Professional design specialisations of the participants ranged from graphic and industrial designers to design researchers, with most interviewees having worked for their organisation for at least a year and had several years of professional design experience. The sample included 43 men and 29 women, mostly in their late twenties to late thirties. They were based in nine different countries, with the majority of interviewees being either European or North American. The design consultants were based at six different design studios of the consultancy, and the in-house designers were based in more than ten different parts of the company.

### ***Data Collection***

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face or via video call asking very open-ended questions on previous experiences at the company, perceptions of the current culture, role of design, and expectations going forward. Interviews lasted an average of 41 minutes; however, the present study is based on responses to only two specific interview questions: the designers were asked to describe their top three and

bottom three moments so far at the companies.

Using reflections on top and bottom moments follows the research approach of participant-selected critical incidents (Cope and Watts 2000). Rather than asking for reflections on meaningful moments in general, asking for the extremes of ‘top’ and ‘bottom moments’ has the advantage that when engaging in retrospective reflections, participants are more likely to recall self-selected, meaningful events in detail and accurately (Chell 2004). In this study, the reflections are not taken to reflect any objective best and worst moments, rather the purpose is to examine memorable events that provide ‘first hand evidence of the relationship between context and outcome’ (Chell 2004, 47) – the outcome being meaningful professional experiences in this case.

No definitions were offered for ‘top’ or ‘bottom moments’ as we did not want to impose any considerations on what the designers themselves found meaningful. The specific wording of the prompt varied from interview to interview to keep the tone conversational to encourage designers to freely share their thoughts. We did not enforce selecting three moments of each type, again the main purpose being prompting to reflect on experiences. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

### ***Data Analysis***

The coding of the data was conducted in four layers. First, the authors went through the entire interview transcripts to identify responses to top and bottom moments, the focus of this study. These responses were segmented to distinct top and bottom moments and coded as separate instances, resulting in 160 coded top moments and 131 bottom moments. Three interviews with male in-house designers were excluded from further analysis, as they had not included the prompt, leaving the sample with 69 designers.



The next two layers of coding were theory driven (top-down), according to the framework constructed based on self-determination theory and orders of justification (see Figure 2) to explore the content and framing of the top and bottom moments. First, the thematic content of these moments on a semantic level (Braun and Clarke 2006) were mapped to the three innate needs (Deci and Ryan 2000). Both authors went through the moments, discussing any differences in coding and unsure cases until agreement was reached. Some of the moments clearly mapped onto a single need - autonomy, competence or relatedness - or could be divided into distinct parts reflecting different needs. However, some experiences were found to fundamentally rely on several dimensions, so intersection codes were created to reflect those experiences related to two or three innate needs simultaneously. Table 1, below, lists the resulting seven self-determination codes and example quotes for each.

Table 1. Self-determination theory-driven codes and interview excerpts

<b>Innate need</b>	<b>Top moment</b>	<b>Bottom moment</b>
Autonomy	'The independence, like you're quite free to do and work.'	'I prepare designs, but it turns out that we have more important things.'
Autonomy + Competence	'Have the opportunity to put the real thinking on that.'	'Not being on a project.'
Competence	'Everyone was onboard ... then I marked it up and they implemented it. It just went so well, so smoothly.'	'Someone coming in evaluating and say[ing] it was a bad thing.'
Competence + Relatedness	'I was [...] a mentor for an intern and he is really, really good.'	'I don't have any support from someone a bit more experienced.'
Relatedness	'Not only do we work together, we also say that we're kind of like a family.'	'I want to get to know people and [...] [be] part of a closer-knit group.'
Relatedness + Autonomy	'Talk to the management [...] to put a proposal together about [...] building community within our organisation.'	'This particular manager [...] gives you some reasons in a condescending, patronising tone.'

Autonomy + Competence + Relatedness	‘Sometimes it looks like we are not going to make it and then we pull everything out of the bags [...] and it’s really nice, because it’s goals we set ourselves.’	‘I was asked to redesign a new standard [...] and it just stopped somewhere, and, so I think the worst part of it was that no one cared about it.’
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In the third round of coding, all moments were coded to the six different orders of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). Again, both authors went through the moments, discussing any differences in coding and unsure cases until agreement was reached.

Table 2. Orders of justification codes and interview excerpts

<b>Order of worth</b>	<b>Top moment</b>	<b>Bottom moment</b>
Inspired	‘We built a [...] grid from Lego, and it was really nice because it was our idea to do that.’	‘[It was] so complicated, I’m not really designing anything super-cool.’
Domestic	‘My boss [...] says, “Okay, these are things I wouldn’t have thought of yet”.’	‘I expected to [...] be applauded [...], but [...] the head of studio [stated] “You used up all of the time resources”.’
Opinion	‘When I [...] received the award [...], [it] paid off.’	(no excerpts were coded into this category)
Civic	‘Everyone was just generally really friendly [...], you feel like family.’	‘I’m the only UX design person [...] so they sometimes don’t know what to do with me.’
Market	‘Getting this job as a UX designer, that was a top moment.’	‘A lot of resource-based challenges, so we had to struggle.’
Industrial	‘It’s exciting to work with new technologies.’	‘I didn’t have project so [...] there was a period of time of waiting.’

This top-down theory driven coding was then complemented by data-driven coding into subcategories based on semantic-level thematic similarity (Braun and Clarke 2006). These self-descriptive categories themselves are key results of the study, in accordance with the critical incident technique (Butterfield et al. 2005). They

characterize the content of meaningful moments in addition to the frame captured in the theory-driven coding.

Finally, distributions of the coded segments were compared across the reported positive and negative moments, and across the two organisations. Quantifying the results by assessing the frequencies of categories and subcategories helped to provide systematicity and transparency to these comparisons (Chi 1997).

## Results

In total, 291 meaningful moments were shared by the 69 interviewed participants: 135 moments by the 35 in-house designers and 156 moments by the 34 design consultants. Most moments reported by the designers affected their competence and relatedness (or both), predominantly positively, and relatively few influenced their sense of autonomy, predominantly negatively (Figure 3).

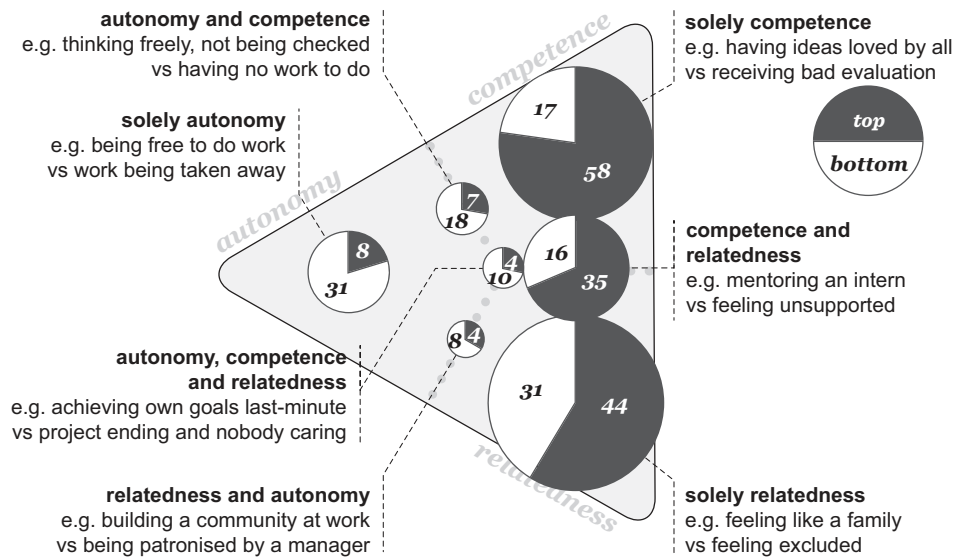


Figure 3. Distribution of top and bottom moments into the innate needs (Deci and Ryan 2000)

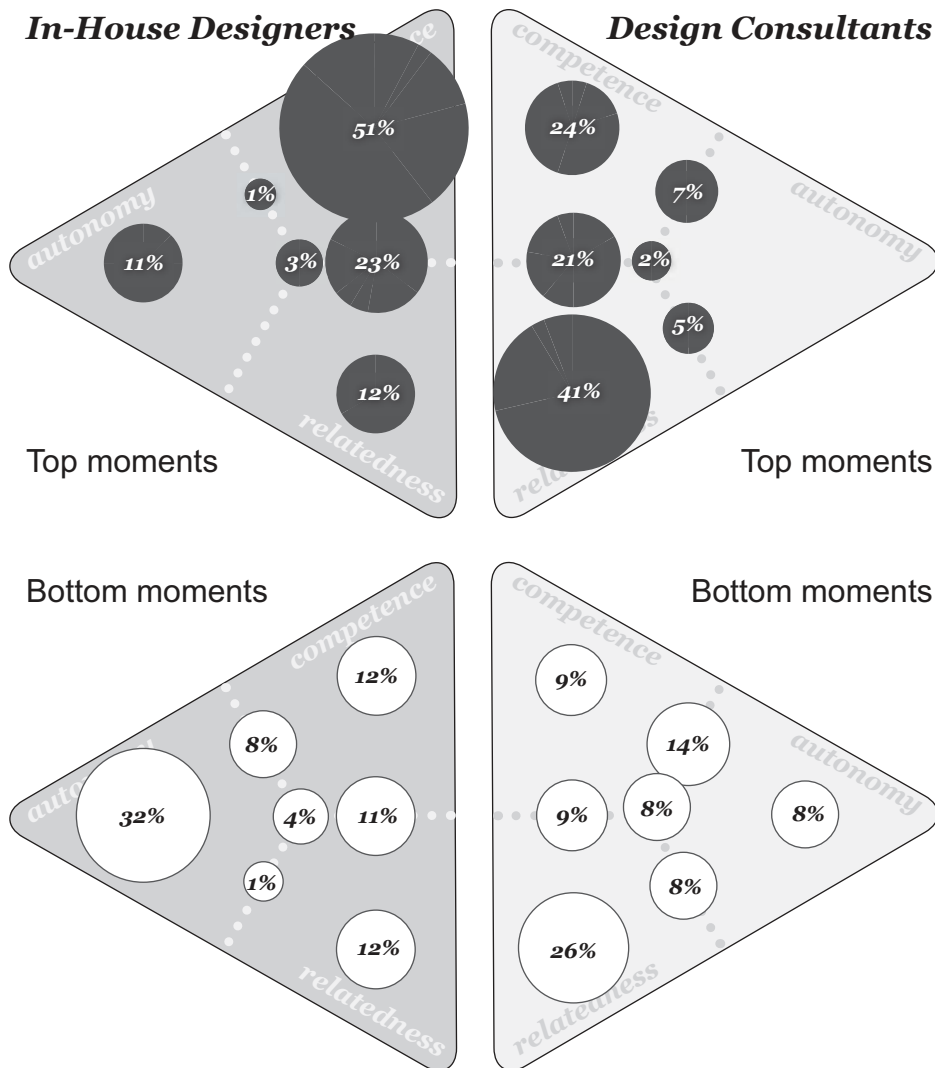


Figure 4. Distribution of meaningful moments into the three innate needs. Percentages are of the total number of top or bottom moments in that organizational context

In-house and consultancy designers had some clear differences in the dominant frames they evoked for their experiences in terms of connected innate needs (Figure 4). Most meaningful positive moments for in-house designers were connected to competence (78% of all top experiences were related to competence). While differences were less pronounced in negative experiences, these were more frequently associated with a lack of autonomy (45% of all bottom moments were related to autonomy).

For design consultants, in turn, positive moments most frequently connected to relatedness (69% of moments included relatedness). None were connected to autonomy

solely (14% to a combination of needs of which autonomy was one). Negative experiences were more evenly distributed across the three different needs, but relatedness was still the most frequently demonstrated need (51%).

We proceed to discuss the meaningful moments first based on which innate need(s) it facilitated or hindered, explained through both their frames (the orders of justification evoked) and content (subcategories). We then present a comparison of the justifications used in the two different organisational contexts.

### ***Moments Influencing Competence***

#### *Facilitating Competence*

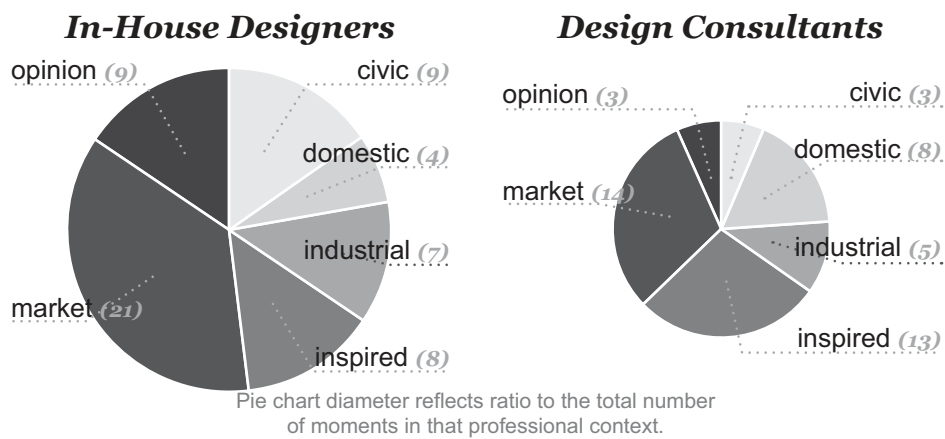


Figure 5. Distribution of meaningful moments facilitating competence (n=104) into the six orders of worth

For in-house designers, 43% of all shared moments related to facilitating their competence. When framed in terms of the **market** world, these moments revolved around projects, processes and individual success. For in-house designers, successful project end results (n=13) were more common, whereas consultants shared more process-related top moments: thinking bigger (3), leading a project successfully (2) and getting involved early (1). Also, both enjoyed developing oneself professionally (9) and

individual success: getting offered positions, promotions or assignments (7).

‘It’s like I’m going back to school and learning.’ (in-house)

When framed as **inspired** moments connected to competence, designers in both organizations shared moments of novelty, such as experiencing new perspectives (7) and learning from or teaching others (5). Additionally, consultants mentioned enjoying variety and freedom of work (5), and executing interesting ideas (4).

Competence-related top moments with **domestic** frames were related to appreciation and recognition from managers and clients. For example, consultants shared getting a position, having a mentor or otherwise being treated well by their managers (8).

‘Two years after he hired me, right, he said, ‘[...] You told me in your interview that you want to work in education one day!’ I’m like holy shish kebab, you remember that?’ (consultant)

In-house designers also shared moments of being appreciated by their managers and client (2) as well as taking care of the team or an intern themselves (2).

Invoking the **civic** world, in-house designers were pleased to see understanding of design increasing amongst colleagues (9), and consultants enjoyed teaching workshops, sharing ideology and discussing ideas (3).

‘My team understands design thinking and [the] user-centred design approach. I’m really glad they [...] know that they are doing it for real users [...] I’m proud of them.’ (in-house)

Competence-related moments with an **industrial** frame included working effectively and smoothly (6) for in-house designers, as well as experiencing new technologies (1). Consultants shared stories of successful projects and proper research

(4) with this justification (whereas in-house designers frequently framed project successes with market justifications), and only one instance of working effectively here.

In-house designers shared a few more moments with an **opinion** frame, taking joy in meeting and inspiring people (4), attending workshops (3) and receiving an award (1). Designers enjoyed giving a talk (2), and additionally consultants enjoyed being part of a huge project (1) and hosting events (1).

### *Hindering Competence*

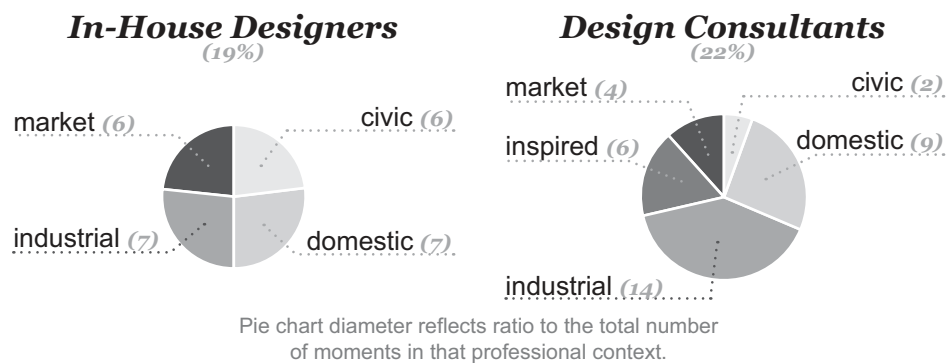


Figure 6. Distribution of meaningful moments hindering competence (n=61) into the six orders of worth

Fewer meaningful moments were reported to constrain than facilitate competence, again mostly framed as industrial and domestic worlds. Consultants described more competence-related struggles with an **industrial** framing than in-house designers: unsuccessful or inefficient projects (7), not having any work (3), and doing useless work or lacking proper resources (2). In-house designers reported feeling unproductive (4), inability to do proper research (1), or not getting feedback (1).

‘We often [...] design [the concept and ...] then by the time you actually see the live thing, it’s total shit, and then it’s like - why did we spend all that time doing this?’ (consultant)

Some high workloads were reported by both in-house (1) and consultancy (2) designers.

Moments framed as **domestic** incompetence were related to receiving negative feedback or no support from managers or clients (13). Additionally, an in-house designer was scared to call their superior (1), a consultant felt abandoned (1) and another was unsure of the quality of their work (1).

‘Having [our design lead] coming to [us asking afterwards] ‘Did you do this? Did you do this? Did you do this?’ It doesn’t help me now, so it’s only crushing [...], I’m still recovering from having a loss of confidence.’ (consultant)

From a **market** point of view, competence was tied to design projects. In-house designers felt less competent when a project was not as impactful as expected (3), killed altogether (2) or over-consuming them (1), as did consultants when projects were destructive or stagnant (4). Consultants also explained feeling less competent with **inspired** reasons, such as uninteresting or unsatisfactory design work (6).

**Civic** struggles hindering the sense of competence of designers included being misunderstood, constrained or scared in the case of in-house designers (6), or having trouble with an irresponsible colleague (1) or the inability to keep a recruit (1) in the case of design consultants.



## ***Moments Influencing Relatedness***

### *Facilitating Relatedness*

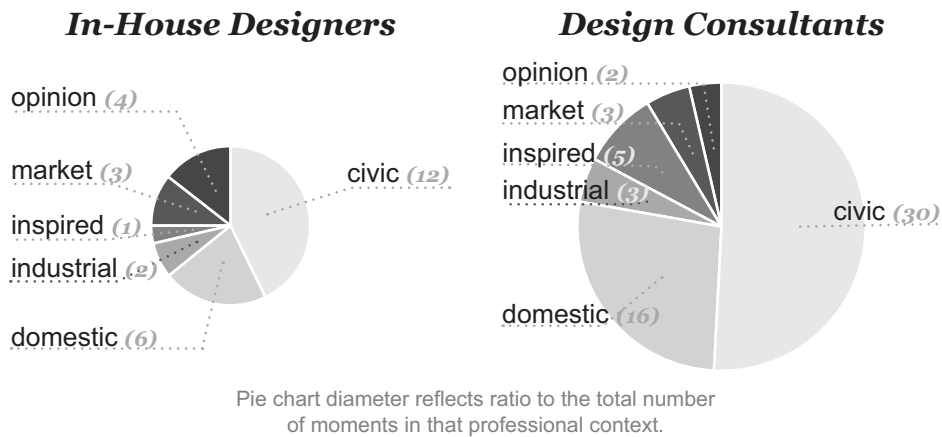


Figure 7. Distribution of meaningful moments facilitating relatedness (n=87) into the six orders of worth

38% of moments shared by design consultants facilitated their sense of relatedness, making it their most common frame. Virtually all moments facilitating relatedness had a civic or domestic justification.

From a **civic** perspective, company gatherings were common top moments for consultants (13), in line with enjoying being part of an equal, honest collective with shared work ideology (10), loving to work together (3), seeing everybody happy (2), visiting other offices (1) and good sparring amongst colleagues (1).

‘Pulling a prank on somebody and just laughing about things and hanging out.’  
(consultant)

In-house designers, in turn, shared only 12 top moments in total with a civic relatedness frame, including receiving appreciation from colleagues (5), being close to each other (4), and social gatherings (3).

**Domestic** appreciation of feeling acknowledged, trusted and valued or genuine

care for well-being (16) was also common for consultants, and in-house designers appreciated open and responsive superiors (6).

**Inspired** relatedness included an in-house designer arranging a get-together (1), and consultants working with inspiring colleagues (3) or environments (2).

‘It’s fun to step away from your own project work to [...] get to work with each other and learn from each other.’ (consultant)

An **opinion** relatedness framing, in turn, was evoked by in-house designers when meeting distinguished people (2), influencing the team (1) or doing a great presentation (1). Consultants framed being part of a ‘huge’ project (1) and hosting a public event (1) as facilitating relatedness.

**Market** and **industrial** rationales were less connected to supporting designers’ relatedness. Successful collaborations and projects, using industrial framing, contributed to meaningful interactions (5). Getting offered a position and successful project results (3) enhanced in-house designers’ sense of relatedness, as did consultants’ moments of developing skills, getting assignments, and expanding internationally (4).

*Hindering Relatedness*

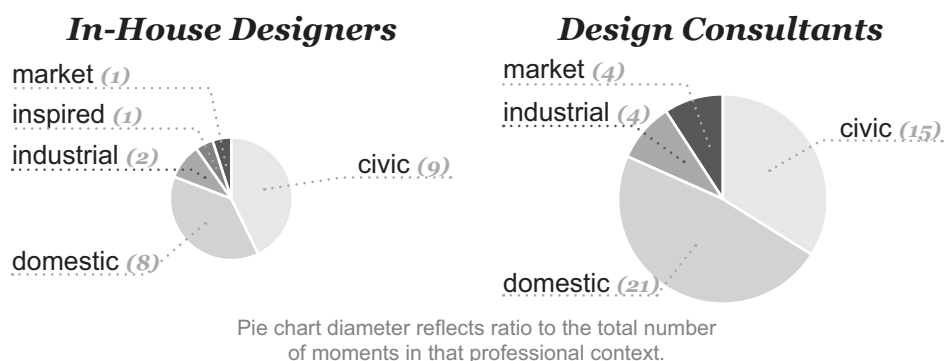


Figure 8. Distribution of meaningful moments hindering relatedness (n=65) into the six orders of worth

Civic and domestic frames were used most in the moments hindering relatedness. With **domestic** reasoning, consultants reported managers being disrespectful, opaque in their communication, distrustful, negative, or discouraging (19).

‘I also felt [...] shut out of meetings and communication. So the examples are like, “Hey, there’s these engineers coming in, should I go talk to them?” –“No, don’t worry about it.” “Hey, there’s a design meeting, can I go in ...?” –“No, don’t. You just work on your thing.” [...] I just felt really disrespected.’ (consultant)

Also, two designers in managerial positions in the consultancy mentioned feeling uncertain about sharing information or having to do lay-offs as bottom moments.

Similarly, in-house designers critiqued managers not being involved or showing support (8). However, they also felt **civic** disconnection stemming from miscommunication (4), not being able to advance design (3) and a lack of appreciation or disrespect from peers (2). Design consultants, on the other hand, used civic justifications when their collective was hurt, such as when colleagues were leaving (10), or when feeling left out (2) or working alone (1).

‘[Alex] had a startup thing, and he just had to go, but [he] was initially the reason why I joined [the company] ’cause [...] I really liked him and I liked his style.’ (consultant)

**Industrial** framing was evoked when bad collaborations with clients (2) and lack of workspace or staff (2) decreased consultants’ relatedness, or when multiple office locations (1) and lack of a proper research setup (1) made it difficult for in-house designers. Projects gone wrong (1) or missed opportunities (1) used a **market** framing, and a lack of mixing with other colleagues (1) an **inspired** framing.

## **Moments Influencing Autonomy**

### *Facilitating Autonomy*

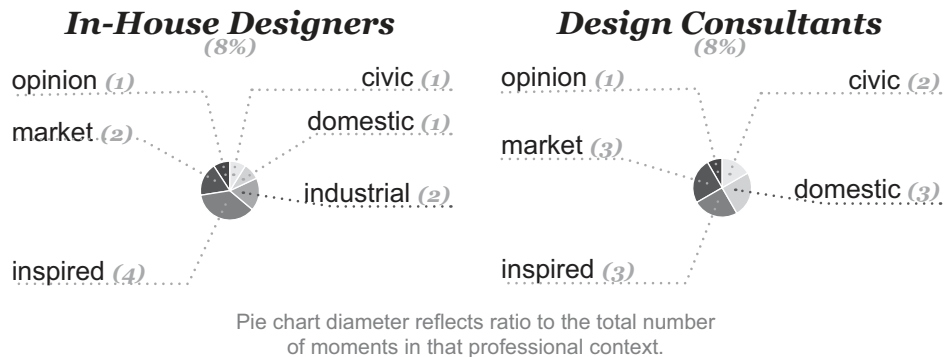


Figure 9. Distribution of meaningful moments facilitating autonomy (n=23) into the six orders of worth

Both in-house and consultancy designers mostly justified moments enhancing their autonomy from an **inspired** perspective, such as doing creative work freely (4), influencing their work environment (2), and having variety of work (1).

‘Sort of the independence, like you’re quite free to do and work, it’s not that strict.’  
(in-house)

Using **market** reasoning, consultants reported instances of process-related autonomy, such as leading a project well (2) and getting involved in a project from the start (1), and in-house designers’ content-related autonomy, namely thinking bigger (1) and working on own ideas (1). Consultants also used **domestic** framing expressing they felt trusted to make decisions independently (2) and influence the way they were managed (1); one in-house designer also expressed the latter one (1).

**Civic**, **opinion** and **industrial** reasons were rarely used in relation to facilitating autonomy. Consultants evoked a domestic frame for enjoying shaping the company (2) and an opinion frame for hosting an event (1). In-house designers shared working on

improvement ideas (1), influencing the team (1), and achieving personal goals (2) as facilitating autonomy with civic, opinion, and industrial frames, respectively.

*Hindering Autonomy*

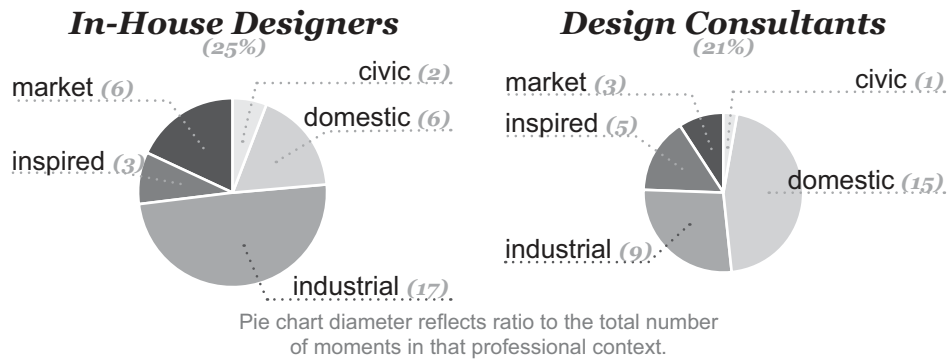


Figure 10. Distribution of meaningful moments hindering autonomy (n=67) into the six orders of worth

Both in-house and consultancy designers shared many more moments hindering than facilitating their autonomy. In-house designers expressed mostly **industrial** hindrances, such as regulations limiting advancing design (8), tedious processes and discussions (3), and having to redo work (3).

‘People in the organisation are really positive towards me and my design colleagues [...], but then it’s another matter to actually get it [...] into the processes in a good way.’ (in-house)

Appropriate workload was an industrial autonomy issue at both organisations: for consultants having no work (3), for in-house designers having workload varying to extremes (1), and for both having too much workload (4). Consultants also experienced industrial nuisance when client were problematic (3) or when work was left unused (1), however, compared to in-house designers, they experienced more domestic, interpersonal issues limiting their autonomy, such as badly managed or opaque projects

(8), discouraging feedback or disrespectful behaviour (3) and distrusting behaviour (2).

“This person has power over me and this person doesn’t deserve to have power [over] me. I can’t really respect this person, because it’s all this power play.”  
(consultant)

Framed **domestically**, contradicting or unclear visions or strategies were demotivating for in-house (4) and consultancy (2) designers. In-house designers also reported pressure (1) and a project cancellation which nobody else seemed to care about (1). **Market** autonomy was decreased in both organizations when projects were killed or cut, mostly resource-driven decisions (9).

An **inspired** frame was evoked when consultants faced unvaried work (5) or in-house designers lamented being unable to do work freely (3). In a few instances, a **civic** framing was given when a consultant faced an irresponsible colleague (1) or in-house designers were unable to advance design in the organisation (2).

### ***Comparison Of Justifications Framing***

To justify their experiences, designers most frequently used domestic justifications, followed by civic, market, industrial, inspired, and, least, opinion justifications (Figure 11).

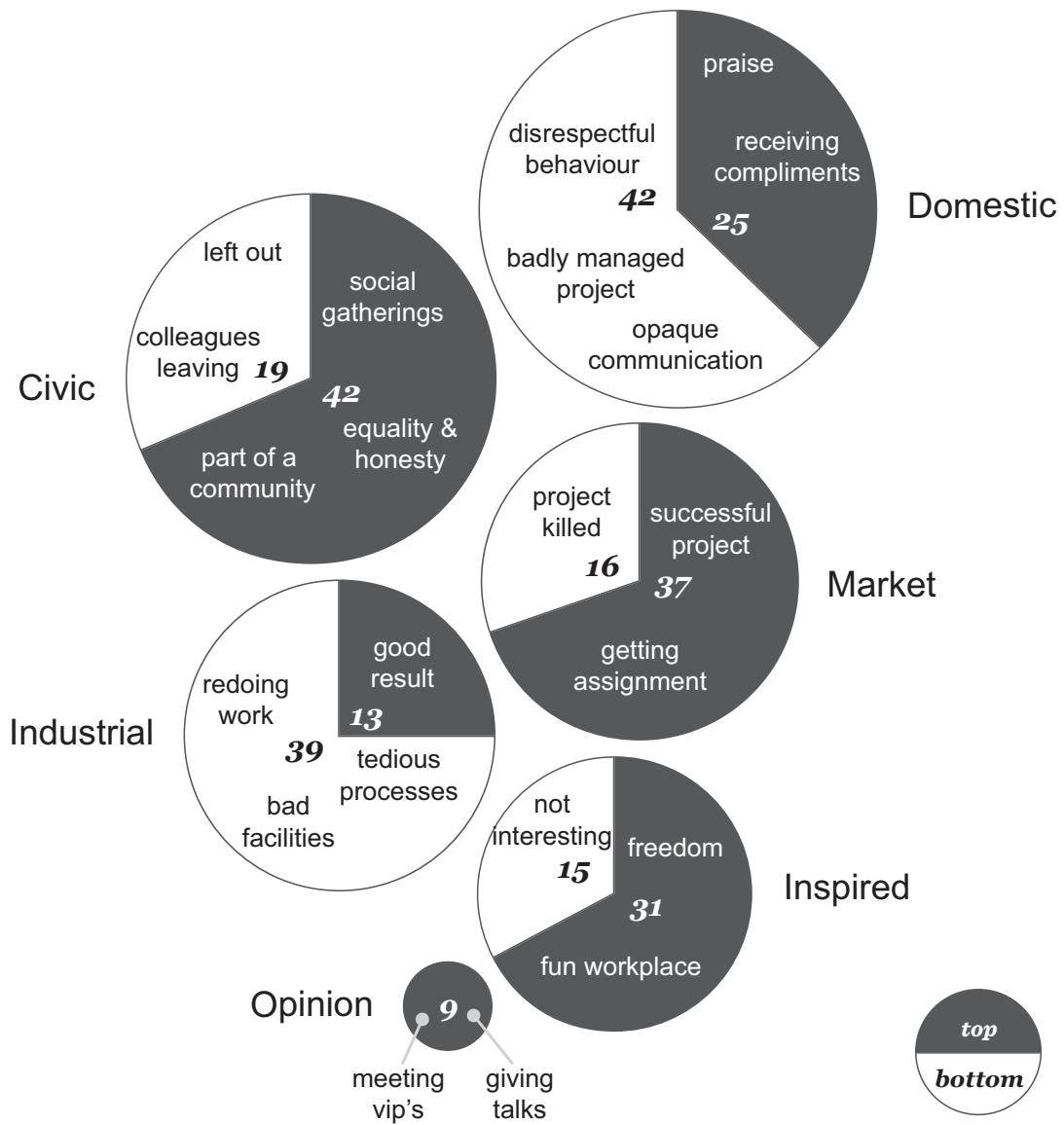


Figure 11. Distribution of top and bottom moments into the orders of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). Words reflect expressions of the designers in these worlds

In-house and consultancy designers also had differences in the dominant frames they evoked for their experiences.

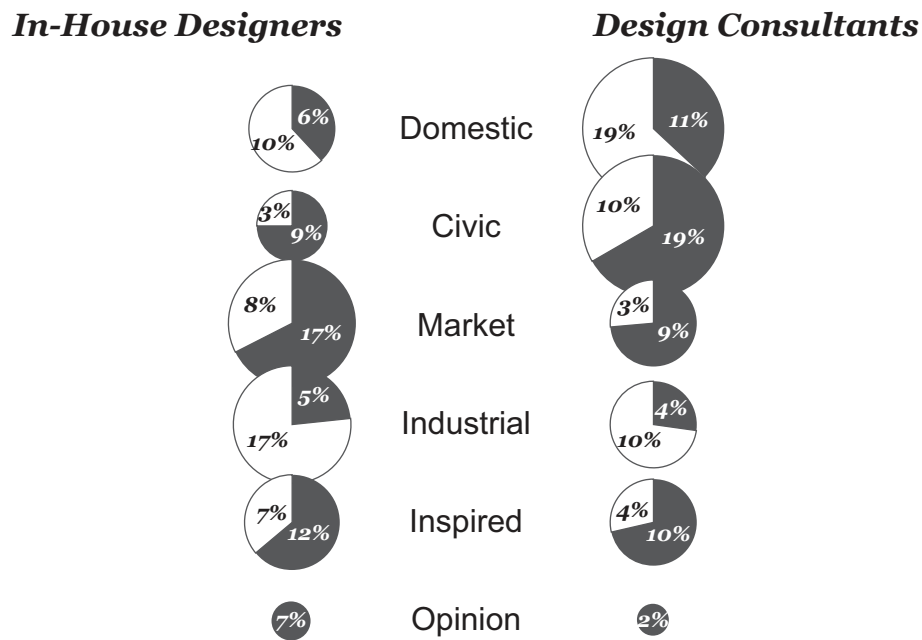


Figure 12. Distribution of meaningful moments into the six orders for worth.

Percentages are of the total number of meaningful moments mentioned by those designers

For design consultants, positive moments were most frequently framed as **civic** (19% of all meaningful moments), all affecting relatedness, and negative moments as **domestic** (19%), mostly connected to relatedness again (72%). Consultants reported enjoying feeling part of a collective, a civic relatedness framing, such as being close to colleagues and enjoying the open atmosphere, both through social gatherings and during work in general. Some bottom moments with a domestic relatedness framing underline this collectivistic feeling, such as feeling sad because colleagues were leaving or when superiors' actions hurt the collective, for example feeling discouraged or disrespected. In general, civic and domestic orders of justification framed 58% of all meaningful moments reported by design consultants (versus only 27% of the moments reported by



in-house designers).

For in-house designers, in turn, **market** was the dominant framing for positive moments (17% of their meaningful moments), almost all enhancing competence (92%). **Industrial** justifications were the most common for negative moments (17%), mostly connected to constraining autonomy (74%). They appreciated getting ahead in their career, which has a market competence framing, such as getting offered a position. Although design consultants frequently reported learning from interesting projects or colleagues as top moments to deepen personal understanding, in-house designers' moments were more connected to organisational advancement. Industrial autonomy issues, such as unproductiveness or unsuccessful projects due to limiting procedures or bad communication as well as having too much or not enough work to do, all potentially stood in the way of in-house designers moving forward professionally. Taken together, market and industrial orders of justification framed 47% of all meaningful moments reported by the in-house designers (versus only 28% of the moments reported by design consultants).

However, although in-house and consultancy designers evoked different orders of justification with different frequencies, the ratios of positive to negative moments in each order of justification were fairly similar. Moments framed with a **civic**, **market** or **inspired** justification were mostly top moments for both contexts, ranging from 64% to 75% of the moments described with these frames. These included moments such as enjoying freedom in and variety of work, being close with colleagues and taking part in social gatherings, as well as achieving successful project results. (Additionally, all moments framed with an opinion justification were top moments, however this order was very rarely used in either organisation.) Of moments framed with a domestic or industrial justification on the other hand, 62% to 77% were bottom moments to both in-

house and consultancy designers. These included experiences such as being inadequately managed, and organisational regulations and processes constraining a sense of autonomy.

## **Discussion**

Based on 69 interviews with design professionals, the current study set out to investigate what designers experience as meaningful moments and how these moments are framed. Examining the top and bottom moments reported by in-house designers and design consultants with a value framework based on innate needs (Deci and Ryan 2000) and orders of interpersonal justification (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006), we add to the recent yet still scant literature on designer identity, roles and rhetoric (Daly et al. 2012; Liu and Hinds 2012; Paton and Dorst 2011), making two key contributions by extending framing studies from design problems and solutions to meaningful moments in professional design.

### ***Motivators In Socially Embedded Design***

First, we echo with a wide data set that the social element of design warrants more attention in design research. The meaningfulness of design content was framed in terms of its social context: user research on site was framed as discovering new perspectives, and good design project outcomes meaningful due to the received appreciation, how it helped their career, or the smoothness of collaborating. Some reported disappointment when their designs were not being used, but good designs for their own sake as top moments were virtually non-existent. Instead, most top moments were related to validation, feeling valued, finding camaraderie and influencing the ways of working of other stakeholders positively. The social side of design work was also seen in the negative experiences: designers in both organisational contexts reported collaboration

challenges and struggled with design in general not being understood when advancing it into new frontiers. Rarely is the design process, its outcomes and their implementation solely in the hands of designers in a professional context. Indeed, Micheli and colleagues (2018) found top management support, leadership of the design function, inter-functional coordination and widespread awareness of the role of design and contribution of design critical for the status of design in a company, affecting in turn the work of individual designers in the organisation.

While the importance of interpersonal skills is already mirrored in most design related job advertisements (Dziobczenski et al. 2018), we extend understanding of the impact of the social context on design through suggesting differential effects of different needs and frames on designers' motivation. Meaningful moments were strongly tied to collaboration, connecting to competence and relatedness. In contrast to these two innate needs, autonomy or a lack thereof was mainly connected to negative experiences. While creative organisations require high autonomy (Andriopoulos 2001), its scarce connection to positive moments in the current study suggest it may be a necessary but insufficient condition for meaningful design work. Conditions promoting autonomy might thus be 'hygiene factors' (Herzberg 1968) in designer motivation - sources of job dissatisfaction when not in order, but insufficient to promote job satisfaction. However, our results can be considered to represent only the extremes of meaningful moments, limited in its retrospective inquiry of critical incidents and only one type of framework for analysis. Future research should investigate the determinants of day-to-day positive and negative moments (Bindl et al. 2012) within design projects, as well as connecting meaningful moments to reports of overall job satisfaction.

### ***Organisational Dependencies In Framing Experiences***

Our second contribution comes from showing how different meaningful moments and

their framing can be dependent on the organisational context and culture. Andriopoulos (2001) suggested, building on Brand (1998), that to encourage creativity, both an innovative (divergent and learning) and supportive (empowering and caring) culture is necessary. It seems that the in-house designers framed their experiences more in line with the innovative side, sharing more moments influencing their sense of competence, justified with market or industrial reasons, such as growing as a professional or landing a position or promotion. Design consultants, in turn, emphasised the supportive culture more, appreciating being part of a collective. They shared more moments influencing their sense of relatedness, both positively and negatively, using mostly a civic and domestic perspective (social gatherings on the positive side and people leaving on the negative side). This is not to say that either group of designers did not value divergent and learning or empowering and caring cultures, but rather the relative emphasis given to these within the socially embedded design practice differed for designers working in different organisational contexts. These may connect, in turn, act as cues to different perceived bases of legitimacy in the organization, offering insights into how tensions in elevating the role of design could be managed (Micheli et al. 2018).

However, with cross-sectional data, we cannot verify whether differences observed between the two types of organisations were due to self-selection of the designers into these contexts (as for example job announcements emphasise different requirements for in-house and consultancy design positions [Yang et al. 2005]), or whether the organisational setting shaped the adopted frames of experiences. Future research should explore the direction of causality of widespread frames between designers and types of organizations, different lenses to frames in social interactions, and how these experience frames are connected to design practices and outcomes.

## ***Conclusions***

Based on an analysis of the nature and framing of the meaningful moments reported by 69 designers, the current study emphasises the organisationally embedded nature of professional design. Dominant frames of meaningful experiences differed between designers working in two different organisations, and these experiences were deeply tied to the other organisational actors that the designers interacted with at work. Based on only two case organisations, the evoked frames cannot be generalised to the experiences of all designers, neither can they be taken to represent typical differences between in-house and consultancy designers. However, with data from multiple sites, nationalities and design specialisations in two different types of design organisations, the commonalities in the framing of experiences across the diverse sample indicate differential effects of various frames on experiences of meaningful design work. All designers found meaning in the social and organizational context of their work, in-house designers focused on efficiency and advancement (or lack thereof) and design consultants on the level of support and learning from colleagues. The results suggesting that while some experience frames such as autonomy are connected to necessary but insufficient conditions for meaningful work, the social dimension of design work can be a strong motivating factor as well as a demotivator. Further research exploring how designers frame their experiences and connecting these frames to motivation, job satisfaction and the roles designers play in different types of organisations offers a promising avenue for advancing understanding of the situated nature of design practice.

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