

upon, the proper design process can begin, creating an outcome that will suit the future context. The client organization, which has been closely involved in envisioning the future context, will see the proposed design in light of this fresh context rather than the original one—this view makes it easier to accept quite radical designs. An example of such a project is the development of a “home office” desk for a mid-sized office furniture manufacturer. The initial brief was set with the normal constraints of a home office in mind: it is the smallest room in the house, it doubles as a storage or guest room, and you only go there when you really need to do some work. So a desk needs to be small, flexible in use, and have clever storage possibilities. Yet these are all assumptions, based on a very particular view of what work is (namely, the production of outcomes), and the role of work in people’s lives (as a nine-to-five activity). In a society where “knowledge work” is becoming more important, and where people are encouraged to work at home to avoid the rush-hour commute to the office, the nature of “work” and the activities supported by a home office are changing fundamentally. Knowledge work is not only about production, but also about inspiration and reflection. Inspiration and reflection are not limited to normal working hours, and they tend to be highly connected and social activities. Thus, retreating to the small dusty “home office” room at the back of the house is probably not a good idea: inspiration and reflection need a much richer environment to thrive. After shifting the problem definition in this way, the designer developed an interactive kitchen table that takes center stage in the house. This table provides intense connectivity with the possibility of leaving digital documents lying about, in view for inspiration and reflection. They can be made to disappear quickly when the table is required for other purposes and be called back when a complete digital working environment when needed. Remember that the client was initially seeking a cheap desk design: shifting the view of what “work” will be in the future has created a new context for the product and opened up much more interesting possibilities. The interactive kitchen table, which would have been a crazy idea in the old context of seeing work as production, is quite logical within the new context.

Besides exploring the future context, the other major strategy that expert designers use to develop the problem situation is abstraction. This involves establishing a completely new context after abstracting from the current one, going back to the core values that must be attained. We will not dwell on this strategy here, as it is modeled and explained at length in the remaining chapters of this book. This peculiar type of abstraction is the core of the frame creation