

to maneuver from a situation where he or she is seen in the role of a “technician” (the client knows exactly what is needed, which the designer then carries out) to that of a “facilitator” (the client knows what is needed but not what is required to achieve it) or an “expert” (the client has a partially formed idea, and the designer must use his or her expertise to negotiate a workable formulation of the brief). For these graphic designers, the preferred mode of working is that of “collaborator,” where the client and the designer mutually work on framing the project in terms of both problem and solution spaces.

From the interview data, we find that designers use abstraction, or an emphasis on the future context in which the design has to function, to sway clients from a problem-solving approach to one that allows for the negotiation of new frames (Hekkert and van Dijk 2011). These are effective ways of steering briefing conversations away from specific outcomes to an exploration of deeper situational values. Designers use metaphor, contextual engagement, and conjecture to “destructure” the problem situation along with their clients to allow reframing to occur. “Mood board” discussions constitute one method designers use to invoke metaphors and analogies. These mood boards assist in creating a more open conversation about a project, as they use abstract images that do not immediately prefigure particular solutions. The interviewed designers all cited contextual engagement through questioning and exploring the situation with the client as a key strategy. Reframing is further assisted by exploring abstracted, conjectured views of the situation. Often, multiple conjectures are posed and are kept intentionally vague in playful conversations: “talking things through what we might explore.” As the most significant barriers to reframing, designers cite the clients’ fixation on their initial idea for the project, following a problem-solving mental model of design (where the client cannot imagine the designer taking a more strategic role), and resistance to journey (where the client feels the need for a quick solution and believes they lack the time or resources to open up the problem situation). In the field of product design, Hekkert and van Dijk (2011) have developed a formal approach to shift the definition of the problem by highlighting a future context. The first step of their model involves critically weighing the assumptions that lie behind the initial brief. To be able to create newness, the designer has to know the thought process that led to the design of current products and to the current problem situation. The designer then proceeds by questioning the importance of those fundamental variables and their current state. The next step is to create an image of the future context as it will develop. Once this has been agreed