

an academic level” (Dorst 2013a). The new academic designer is able to deal with more complex problems than the traditional skills-based design paradigms allow—as a result, academic design moves away from teaching a skills base (the typical “design ability” [Cross 1990] approach) to a knowledge base, extending its scope, its breadth of application, and its intellectual depth. Pioneering design schools have adopted such an academic design profile, and their graduates successfully operate in positions that hitherto would not have been accessible to designers. But setting out to change the very nature of the profession that is being taught is a big step for a school, and is a formidable challenge for both staff and students. Even the perception of what signifies “quality” in a designer will have to shift. To radically transform the practice of an organization as complex as an educational institution, we need to be active on many fronts— changing the discourse, very much like the leading designers that were introduced at the end of chapter 3. New staff members have been hired that embody various aspects of academic design—some of them more research-oriented, others crossing boundaries between disciplines. In parallel to these bringers of new practices, people have been hired who create critical frameworks (scholars in critical theory, history, and social sciences) to reflect on these new developments and help shape them. Talks and exhibitions have been organized to stimulate debate. New research labs have been set up in prominent places to highlight the research activity going on inside. A research gallery has been opened, showing results of both theory-based and practice-led research projects. Within the curriculum, multidisciplinary design labs have been established where students learn how to deal with open-ended challenges outside their disciplinary comfort zone. Exhibitions become a regular feature of various courses, showing their development and exposing staff and students to discussion and debate.

What can we learn from these cases? First, it’s clear that changing an organization’s practice is a curiously indirect process. A practice is a complex combination of perceptions, thoughts, and actions that are inextricably linked (Bower, Crabtree, and Keogh 1996). Because practices touch every aspect of an organization, the changing of a practice involves many small initiatives, rather than expressing a grand vision and expecting people to fall in line behind the visionary leader. In the case of the design school, these initiatives involved human resources, the execution of demonstration projects, and making these new developments visible (through physical changes to the building). We can only