

# DESIGNING CHANGE

Hong Kong should stop resting on its laurels as the hotbed of entrepreneurship in Asia. It should also aim at becoming a hub of innovation for business concepts, branding, products and services through the creative use of design with a capital “D”.



**EDMUND LEE**

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In a globalised economy, change is the norm for all businesses to survive and grow. Despite its reputation as the world's freest economy and one of Asia's top innovative cities, Hong Kong runs the risk of resting on its laurels. As our neighbouring economies are in design-led transformations and hot pursuit of opportunities and sustainable development, leaders across all sectors must acquire a creative mindset, be innovative and cherish the belief that getting the job done is just not good enough.

Creating a creative place is not a fad. Developing the design industry and accompanying creative ecosystem helps to bring the design vibe to our city. The ‘creative spill’ offers mind-nourishing rejuvenation amid our hectic lives and helps to enhance our economic competitiveness and societal wellbeing. Hence, nurturing design talents and entrepreneurs is crucial in our public mission to raise design sensibility and widespread use of ‘Design’. The recent opening of PMQ – the revitalised former Police Married Quarters on Hollywood Road – for design entrepreneurs shows a committed effort to foster enterprising creativity in the city.

## BEYOND INSTITUTIONAL THINKING

The story of Hong Kong's transformation from a fishing port is nothing short of miraculous, thanks to its people's enterprising spirit, resilience and decades of hard work. Our city is known around the world for its efficiency and the competence of its financial and professional services. Hong Kong also boasts an increasingly vibrant creative environment. Our system-level use of design in our international airport, mass-transit railways and down to the Octopus cards are all highlights of substantive innovative achievements par excellence, not to mention many other unsung entrepreneurial successes.

Indeed, the ways of doing business in Hong Kong have changed. Efficiency, greater awareness of design, and innovation agility – not just innovation – are key drivers for success. As a vivid reference, the expressive “K-style” has lived up South Korea as a creative hub, thanks to the strong embrace of design and technology in its culture.

Hong Kong has matured with mighty institutions envied by many. With its growing

proress in creative power, game changing through design and innovation gives fresh impetus for new experience and sustainable performance. Conservatism does not work well in a sea of changes. We need to step away from the comfort zone and avoid getting trapped by institutional thinking. The ability to discover new needs, connect with customers and co-create solutions requires a new mindset, new knowledge and new skills over and beyond our proven business competence.

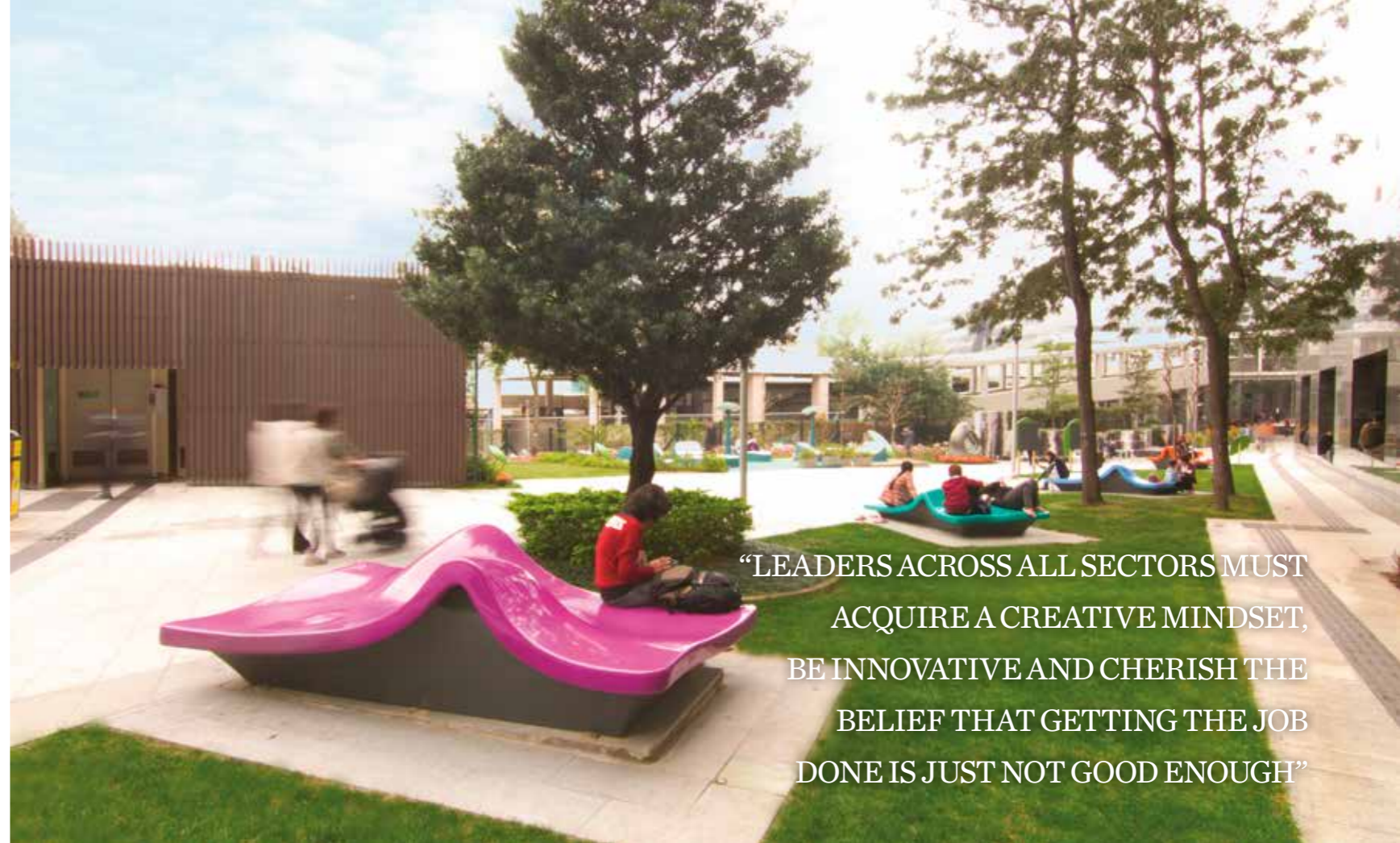
## DESIGN WITH A CAPITAL ‘D’

Design is beyond aesthetics. The evolution of design with the capital ‘D’ (for design leadership and “design thinking”), democratisation of design (for cross-disciplinary collaboration and co-creation to solve problems) and the emergence of “designer founders” underpin a growing recognition of the power of design for enterprising creativity and creating for the greater good. “Design thinking” is about human-centric design, and design as business strategy. The invention of smart phones and their manufacturers' innovation agility are notable examples.

The late Steve Jobs – as a visionary leader, an entrepreneur, a CEO, a design thinker and a marketer – demonstrated the fine qualities of a design-minded business leader who valued design and technology as core DNA of a winning enterprise. He believed that designers could not be placed at the mercy of other managers or functions, so he integrated design into Apple's organisational culture and across its business functions. Customer-experience innovations are achieved through sustained new interactions and outside-in framing of business challenges. Only with design mindfulness can one project new technologies and enhance user experience through interactions and the innovative mix of products and services.

## BRIDGING CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

The concept of “designer founders” recognises the important role designers or design-minded executives play in founding a company or transforming a business. Design bridges creativity and innovation, and is a



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crucial driver for delivering game-changing solutions and meaningful impact.

Only “Innovation” focused on user experience will result in world-class products and services. Design-minded executives inspire teams to walk the journey of discovery and explore the world. In fact, product and service innovations are forever a work in progress. Managing innovation is about managing chaos, requiring integrated thinking, science, intuition, resilience, strong people skills and the ability to inject enterprise-wide creativity and design thinking. Just as in social innovations, designers, entrepreneurs and other stakeholders work wonders for outcomes and impact through co-creation. The redesigned Mong Kok Post Office and Cornwall Street Park – a joint project by the Hong Kong Design Centre (HKDC), the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and the Architectural Services Department (ASD) – are examples of good public-service design.

## REWRITING THE GAME PLAN

Change cycles are speeding up in a hyper-networked society. Business leaders need to be sensitive to trends, culture and technology. With digital disruption causing upheaval in almost every industry, more companies will move toward marrying the emotional with big data and analytics, people with technology and interactive experience, and business with purpose and meaning.

With the millennials coming on board, following Generations Y and X and the Baby Boomers, consumer and workplace behaviours

are fast changing. Disruption needs design thinking to rewrite the game plan and leadership to steer in the VUCA – volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous – environment. In the digital era, the growing popularity of 3D printing, e-tailing, multiple and simultaneous platforms of communication, and new materials such as graphene, will expedite user-centric innovations and experiential engagement.

## LEARN, UN-LEARN AND RE-LEARN

The creative economy thrives on the “T-shaped” development of skills, creative confidence and co-creation through cross-knowledge domains and interactions. Hong Kong, as the hotbed of entrepreneurship in Asia, should be further advanced as the hub of innovation of business concepts, branding, product and service delivery, thriving on Design and Innovation.

In the digital era, with the advent of science and technology, cultural intelligence helps us to see the future. That's why design thinking, building empathy muscles and culture mapping can help businesses to better understand users, the trend forces, languages, signifiers, and hence, to better reposition their brands, products and services accordingly.

It's time to cherish design thinking and foster creative confidence. Failing that, we and our businesses will be timed out. Be prepared. 🕒

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The revamped Cornwall Street Park next to City University of Hong Kong in Kowloon Tong is an example of good public-service design – a joint effort by the HKDC, LCSD and ASD.

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