

ATINER CONFERENCE PRESENTATION SERIES No: ARC2024-0351

ATINER's Conference Paper Proceedings Series

ARC2024-0351

Athens, 13 November 2024

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Energy Distribution Firm Case, Ankara**

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ARC2024-0351

Athens, 13 November 2024

ISSN: 2529-167X

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**Reading the Design Process in the Creative Industry:
Energy Distribution Firm Case, Ankara**

This study aims to investigate the design process from its inception and to examine the dynamics of client-designer interactions. The Ankara Headquarters Office of Enerjisa, a power distribution and retail company, serves as a case study to evaluate the design process executed by the international creative agency I-AM. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology, this investigation analyzes the spatial context through a diverse array of data sources, including written, visual, and auditory materials. Data collection was conducted with precision to support a comprehensive analysis of the built environment. A semi-structured interview was carried out and subsequently transcribed, and the research team was provided with inspirational and informative materials specifically generated by the design team for this project. The study dissects the design process into three major stages, namely exploration, generation and implementation. Ultimately, the research concentrates on the 'inspirational' materials to deepen understanding of the communication dynamics between clients and designers, employing an innovative methodological approach.

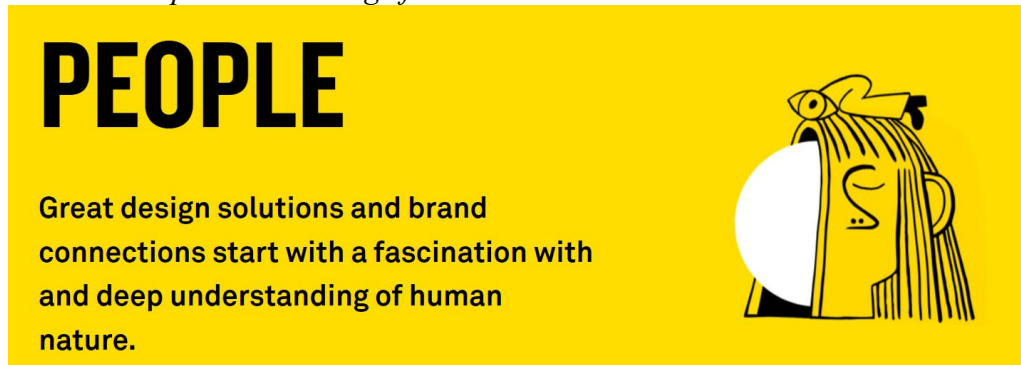
Keywords: *design management, interior architecture, inspirational cards, design process*

Introduction

Design is a transdisciplinary heading in general approach and there is a cycle related to communication within the process (Lawson, 2005, p. 33). This process involves a reversible process involving the client-designer, in some cases the designer-user, and sometimes all of them. The discipline of interior architecture is performed by professionals who organize in a spatial context and create a qualified spatial scheme by meeting user and employer expectations. Design firms and spatial formations themselves, by their nature, are realized through the completion of a series of stages. This research investigates Enerji-Sa Customer services interior space as a case study, to understand the realization of an interior architectural project in a holistic perspective. The project had been designed and implemented by I-AM Associates.

The Firm itself has a distinctive approach to a holistic design strategy for any brand. Stating their universal structure with the presence of three studios, the global design company states on their web platforms that they deepen their creative work with a singular mentality (I-AM, n.d.). The design company and its activities on a universal scale and its realized spatial designs. The quote which is located at their interface rhetorically “*We’re independently owned by six designers, architects, and digital experts. Creating game-changing designs gets our hearts pumping*” reflects the approach of the design teams and highlights the keyword of game-changing in every step. It is also possible to read from the interface as a motivation that the design approaches include the global network, but the designer's views focus on local approaches. The design office that is the subject of this article is based in Istanbul. It can be stated that it carries out its designs with the approach of new generation brand analysis, strengthening the design strategy in user and spatial context, in line with the above-mentioned principle.

Figure 1. *Great Design Solutions and Brand Connections Start with a Fascination with and Deep Understanding of Human Nature*



In this context, the design firm that carried out the design and implementation processes of the case study collectively carries out the preliminary research phases in the early stages of the design, taking a highly innovative approach in the relationship with the user and customer. Specifically, customers are considered within their experiences and thinking of their previous experiences. Thus, the

previous experiences are becoming a starting point for an innovative idea that will be built upon.

Figure 2. *The Motto of the Design Firm Related with Interior Design and Implementations*

Our Capabilities ——— **Physical experiences are the ultimate manifestation of any brand. The best of them transform, enhance and inspire.**

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

The design firm and its ideology are focused on "enriching experiences" to establish a connection between human behavior and nature. The firm uses a highly detailed but also precise approach, employing three steps to develop the conceptual notion of the space. The team conducted primary research, gathering information through interviews and surveys, and meticulously analyzed potential consumers and brand stakeholders by evaluating user needs, insights, and the impact of brand expansion. The distinguished part

Methodology, Materials, and Results

This study examines the customer service center of an energy company operating in Ankara with its design criteria and design approach. The company's widespread mission is producing/distributing electricity and spreading awareness issues related to energy saving/usage. Enerjisa carries out social responsibility duties as well as energy distribution, production, and consultancy. In particular, the customer service headquarters examined within the scope of the sample research of this study can be considered as a social awareness center. Therefore, to spread awareness related with renewable energy and energy efficiency offer customers a new experience with interior design and flow.

Qualitative research methodology was used as the research method in the study. Qualitative research was used to here is to invite the customer to a new intellectual phase while creating a general cross-section of the customer. At this stage, the first steps of an innovative process are taken. After the impacts and important aspects of exploration, a contextual inquiry targets the gathered information. Which includes the steps of co-design workshops and diary studies. The fundamental and one of the important mapping ideologies depends on thinking all the aspects of the space. The mapping strategy obtains the insight of the experiences as in the definition of holistically.

The material of this research was created by Enerjisa's Customer Services Center and the design strategies evaluated during the design process. In the research, documents related to the spatial design process created by I-AM Associates, design samples, customer feedback and semi-structured interviews conducted with I-AM

Associates constituted the material of the study. During the meeting with the Chief Customer Manager of I-AM Istanbul Office, the process and documents related to the process were discussed in detail, and the implementation reality or constraints of the project were revealed. This methodology provides a comprehensive analysis of the design phases and interior architectural components of Enerjisa Customer Service Center.

Thus, this study focuses on examining the design logic, discovering structural elements and user/customer experience. On site experiences and interviews with designers shed light to the mental and implementational phases of the project.

Literature Review

The Design process is studied by various disciplines interested in developing new products, services, or technologies to create a structured process for firms to identify important metrics for the design brief and verify the outcomes during the projects. Design processes can be explained in three main phases: exploring the field, design concept generation, and implementation. Each of these stages is crucial for finalizing a successful design process.

Design Briefing in Creative Industries

The exploration phase can be defined as structuring a design brief including problem definition, evaluation of competitors, the definition of the target market, planning the project schedule, defining testing and verification processes, deciding required staff in the project team, and in the light of these steps planning the budget.

The exploration stage is important for analyzing the existing conditions in the field and the definition of the problems to be solved or improved. A successful design brief is based on building good communication between the client and the consultancy. Once both sides state their expectations from the project clearly, they can finalize this document to verify the outcomes of the concepts and designs. Moreover, the design brief affects the project outcome because the communication between the client and the design agency helps companies to share required data and decide the actors' responsibilities (Ryd, 2004). However, Philips (2004) mentions no absolute design briefing process exists due to highly changing variables for different cases. In other words, companies should develop their design briefing processes according to the realities of their sectoral ecosystem. On the one hand, regulations and safety measures become dominant in industries such as toys, medical devices, and defense. On the other hand, innovation and originality promise better competitive advantage in emerging industries such as digital technologies, and entertainment.

Aim of Design Research in Creative Industries

Design research can be defined as research activities aiming to generate data that will turn into design knowledge with the accumulation of studies in the field.

The aim of these studies can be for both academic and professional purposes. Academy and design practitioners share similar design tools in data generation but differences between their aims affect approaches to the research. Design practitioners fulfill their tasks in the project timetable and budget. Limitations in time, budget, and staff make framing the research critical, which is mentioned as one of the ten heuristics by Hannington (2015). Therefore, even if the same methods are shared with academic studies, the practicality of the study is enhanced by methods developed by professionals. These tools can be generated by companies that carry out research repeatedly in their projects and have access to required assets in terms of budget and staff.

The methods in design research are quite versatile. In terms of the researchers' aim, techniques are grouped under three themes which are explorative, evaluative, and generative (Hannington & Martin, 2012). Explorative research aims to describe the existing conditions in the project field. This research approach is frequently adopted in design education due to the lack of experience of design students. Students are expected to carry out research to recognize the competitors, actors, and needs in the project field. The same principle is also valid for design professionals. If design consultancies have projects in different fields, companies have two options. They can carry out explorative research or prefer to transfer the tacit knowledge from their clients. The second option depends on the accuracy of the information provided by the client. Moreover, eliminating the research stage in the project schedule will limit the potential contribution of the design agencies. Still, the decision is closely related to the financial limitations.

Evaluative research focuses on the evaluation of design ideas and project outcomes. Most research studies in usability labs can be grouped under this theme. Evaluative research helps designers test and improve their design ideas. The iteration potentials in different sectors change the application of these research methods. To illustrate, evaluative methods are frequently used in digital product development. Developers publish their design improvements for their users to try new components of apps. Another example is the simulation of plans in architectural design via computational tools for simulating the performance of the proposed design on issues such as circulation, heating, lighting, etc.

Generative research methods are used for design ideation. The design teams use these techniques to expand their ideation abilities and include other actors. The inclusion of actors in the design process can be at different levels. The actors can be a part of the generation of design insights. In other words, clients can take part in the development of these insights in brainstorming sessions. They can be supported with research materials prepared by design teams. Furthermore, design teams can include actors in the design act called as codesign. Designers cooperate with users on equal ground in the development and decision-making process. Still, the involvement of the participants in these sessions should be examined by design professionals in terms of feasibility.

Research Methods Used in Creative Industries

The methods employed in the design research can be grouped under two themes: traditional techniques and creative ones. Traditional research techniques are used in field studies by almost every discipline. The most well-known techniques are interviews and questionnaires. The interviews are used to acquire in-depth information. The outcomes of the method depend on the experience and qualification of the interviewer. Pilot studies are another important step for a successful interview because questions, toning, wording, and the order of the interview should be improved with a series of pilots before the field study. Questionnaires are another traditional method frequently used with two advantages: number of participants and data analysis. The questions in the survey should be tested with a series of pilot studies, especially online questionnaires because researchers will not be present to explain the research material. Thus, all questions and answers must be clear and easy to understand. Once the questionnaire is prepared, researchers can carry out their research with a high number of participants and turn their data into findings easily by coding. Another traditional research method frequently used in design research is observation. This technique helps design teams analyze existing behavioral patterns and routines. The observations can be participatory, non-participatory, or indirect which defines the involvement of the researcher in the process (Ciesielska et al., 2018).

Creative methods can be described as the ones that utilize the creative abilities of researchers in the generation of research materials and use these materials to enrich communication between participants and researchers. The most well-known methods employed by design researchers can be listed as personas, inspirational cards, visual ethnography, cultural probes, and storyboards. The appropriate method is selected according to the purpose of the study. If the design team needs to illustrate the construct of target users' characteristics, they would prefer personas, fictive characters created by the design team, to reflect the priorities and key factors of the target group. Cultural probes can be used for monitoring participants' routines in a self-reflective approach like in diary studies. Visual ethnography and inspirational cards can be used to communicate and understand target users through images. The advantage of this technique is the fact that the use of visuals can be more useful compared to texts and words. Storyboards help study the proposed design idea in context. Design teams can create storyboards or journey maps to study the design concept from a wholistic perspective.

The Project Process

The project started with the problem of senior users visiting customer relations office about billing problems. Thus, the office is closely linked with negative conditions and crises that link the office environment with negative experiences. The project aims to turn the overall experience into a positive one.

The project lasted seventeen weeks including planning, idea generation, concept design, design embodiment, and detailing. The project process starts with a

series of presentations and a workshop composed of inspirational/informative materials. In the idea generation stage, the design team explored potential layout ideas, some of which were eliminated due to their feasibility. Once the promising initial design has matured, the project continues with the detailing of the experience areas.

Exploration Process

Designing a space has a huge impact on people's lives. Workshops Offered by I-AM Associates I AM Associates led interactive workshops for designing the Enerjisa Customer Service Center. Participants in these workshops included regional managers, communications specialists from lower-level offices, and, if available, Customer Experience (CX) experts. The approach was carried out by a team of about 11 people, who incorporated feedback from office personnel and senior executives to develop a multifaceted design perspective. The workshops utilized images, interactive participation post-its, the brand core (archetype, appearance, tone of voice), personas, and user experience maps.

Participants in the workshops were chosen to ensure that varied perspectives were represented in the design process. This group included regional managers, customer service professionals from Enerjisa's lower offices, and if possible CX experts. This composition was required to fulfill the demands and expectations of various operational levels and develop a comprehensive design.

The workshops are well organized. Initially, participants and their information were gathered to encourage them to express their ideas. This is a way of building a participatory teamwork. Participants were encouraged to freely communicate their suggestions to make a deepened comment. In the workshop, it is also used an interactive post-it strategy to picture and concretize their ideas.

The brand key assumption is the roadmap that includes essential components that mold the company's identity and spatiality in the end. This key contains critical elements that represent brands specific goals, values, and customer range. The design firm fundamentally works with three aspects which are the archetype, look, and tone of speech. The essential qualities that define a brand's identity and character are referred to as its 'archetype'. Brand key has a reflection of total behavior reading conceptually. Appearance includes all the components that make up the brand's visual identity. It is also evaluated in both participant groups to improve recognizability and perceivability. The evaluation includes mostly colors, typography, logos, and other visual features.

The brand's communication language are determined by its tone of voice is a type of style that creates communication between the brand and the customer. This is also improving brand's expansion through an emotional connection with customers while also increasing interaction. The key of communication and usage of brand key to a consistent brand identity and a strong relationship with customers. This key underlines the brand's distinctness and gives a competitive edge. Unilever's brand key successfully leads the company's brand strategy and adds to the long-term increase in brand value.

Brand keys are used by I-AM to help brands communicate effectively in the design processes. A brand key is a handbook that includes critical aspects that determine the brand's identity, strategy, and values (Brakus, 2009). This document outlines the brand's archetype, tectonic or design. To begin, the notion of archetype inside the brand key is critical since it shows the brand's personality and character. It expresses the brand's beliefs, attitudes, and actions. When working with customers, I-AM discovers brand archetypes that help them develop a powerful identity within the structural way. Atmospheric visual aspects such as colors, logos, typography, and other visual components that contribute to the brand's visual identity. These aspects contribute to the brand's recognizability and perceptibility. I-AM provides clients to consult the brand key framework.

Generation Phase

After three main personas are structured and three components of the Brand Key are decided, the main design principles are shaped under three keywords: smartness, flexibility, and interaction. Smartness is the use of smart technologies for building a seamless customer experience. As one of the personas aims at elderly customers who have difficulties adapting to digital tools in customer services, the communication with the customers is not narrowed down to these digital tools. A customer representative companion is employed in a CRM-integrated reception stage to create a sincere atmosphere in helping these customers. The employees and the digital tools used in the tablets support the learning stage of customers adapting to online reservations reducing the crowds and queues in the waiting area that create stress and negative experiences. Flexibility is reflected in the concept by allowing a flexible layout for dividing spaces for different customer services. The office space is divided into four areas: Customer Services Area, Experience Hall, Account Receivables Office, and rooms for individual needs and back services (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Layout Plan of Concept Design (Adapted from I-AM Presentations)*



As mentioned earlier the project started with the problem definition of customers' lack of digital skills in bill payment and reception which leads to crowds and negative experiences. In other words, clients without any problem do not visit the headquarters. The design consultancy suggested their client to turn the headquarters into a space which would be visited by not only customers, but also children from schools and families visiting the shopping mall since the office is located at the center of the city. The design team created an experience hall as a result of the idea aiming to create awareness of electricity use by reflecting the outcomes of excessive electricity use in different scales. The experience hall is called 'Energy Tunnel'. The tunnel starts from the global scale followed by city and individual levels (see Figure 4). On each level, visitors are informed about issues of energy production and consumption. Visitors can see the outcomes of their electricity use in daily life on climate as the amount of fossil fuel for using an old technology light bulb for a year. Another example is about how smart cities would help increase energy use efficiency through smart buildings, intelligent transportation systems, and decentralised energy.

After the concept is finished in terms of CMF, layout and furnishing (see Figure 5), the implementation of the 'Energy Tunnel' is continued by a digital agency. I-AM mentioned that executing graphic and digital components' design (interfaces, screens, projections, etc.) is critical in the later stages. Still, the company emphasized that the concept has been kept almost original in the realization stage.

Figure 4. *Layout Plan of Experience Hall (Adapted from I-AM Presentations)*

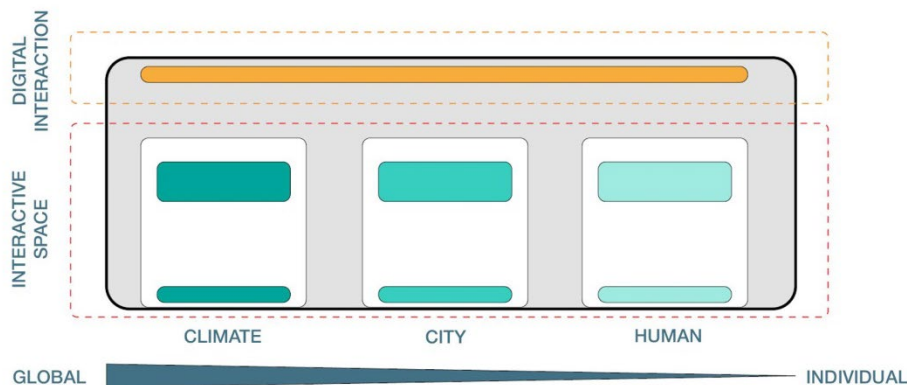


Figure 5. *The Energy Tunnel Concept Renders (Adapted from I-AM Presentations)*



The Energy Tunnel divides the office into two separate spaces. Customer services are located on the left side of the office and the account receivable office is placed on the other side with WC and rooms for back services. The design decision helped divide the customers into two separate areas to keep the customer experience in control. Customer services deal with daily problems customers encounter. However, the accounts receivable office deals with more serious issues such as payment of non-paid debts which is usually a negative experience. Thus, the isolation of this area from the main office area helps keep a peaceful environment. The customer service area is the largest part of the office which is 338 square meters. The area includes desks of customer service representatives, a waiting area, meeting rooms, a shared office, a screen for activities and presentations, and a manager's office. The waiting area is located at the center of the space and is surrounded by the counters (see Figure 6). One important design decision taken is the location of the manager's desk. We expect managers to have a separate office in the open offices with glass doors or dividers. However, the manager is located behind the column in this plan which is hidden but still, the manager can monitor the workspace. This design creates a lateral hierarchy between the employees and also helps the manager to take action in a short time. A screen is placed next to the waiting hall for activities with seating units and two meeting rooms are placed next to the screen (see Figure 7).

Figure 6. *Customer Service Space Layout Plan (left) & Render of the Waiting Hall (right) (Adapted from I-AM Presentations)*



Figure 7. *Screen for Activities (left) & Shared Office and Managers Office behind (right) (Adapted from I-AM Presentations)*



Implementation Phase

I-AM designed the Enerjisa Customer Service Centre in Ankara, which has a significant character. As a characteristic approach usage of color, especially bright yellow and gray tones create a warm and dynamic atmosphere. Waiting and seating space is organized around a plant-filled island type unit, which promotes relaxation and comfort. Individual client service booths give both privacy and efficiency across the space. Notably, the design combines interactive digital displays and clear signage, which contribute to a well-organized and user-friendly environment. The interior is focused on functionality, attractiveness, and customer engagement.

The implementation process is the most important part of realization of a design ideology. While there may be many problems, constraints, and application errors during the implementation phase, project revisions are mostly made at this stage. These problems comprised a set of limits that shaped the space's ultimate layout and characteristics. These limitations are on some design components as well as compliance with safety laws.

One of these difficulties was the impossibility to create a smoking area for customers. Furthermore, the existence of unneeded doors inside the space, as well as the need to comply with fire safety rules, resulted in an excess of doors in certain sections, possibly interfering with the flow and aesthetics of the interior. Numerous obstacles were encountered during the implementation phase. These constraints-

imposed restrictions on certain design elements and compliance with safety laws. One of the major challenges was the impossibility of establishing a dedicated smoking area on the premises due to legislative limitations. The existence of unnecessary doors at the inner space, along with the necessity to adhere to fire safety rules, resulted in an unwanted division in the manner of visuality. This presents a possible interruption in the flow of the interior façade.

Furthermore, fire safety led to the inclusion of an excessive number of doors in some parts of the interior space. It is affecting overall design coherence and spatial functionality. Despite these problems, I-AM is likely to have successfully controlled the obstacles and changed the interior design to suit regulatory standards. The final design would most likely achieve a compromise between regulatory compliance, client preferences, and design integrity, resulting in a visually satisfactory and useful environment.

Discussion and Conclusion

I-AM's design process for the Enerjisa Customer Service Center raises various issues for debate notably. In term of understanding design implementation problematics, collaborative approach arises the concern of transparency. The workshop's absence of service users reduces the possibility to acquire firsthand ideas and preferences, perhaps resulting in a design that does not entirely fit with end users' wants and expectations.

The limits faced during the implementation phase show the practical difficulty of carrying out design ideas. The design does not appear to prioritize sustainability ideas or practices due to feasibility issues, limiting an increasingly crucial part of contemporary design. Incorporating sustainable features and techniques might improve the Customer Service Center's long-term profitability and environmental responsibility, connecting it with overall sustainability goals. On the plus side, the awareness center's design demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity by catering to a wide range of ages and addressing a variety of needs and interests. However, genuine inclusion involves a more extensive integration of user inputs and perspectives throughout the design process to create spaces that meet the diverse needs of all users.

Throughout design process, the selection of the materials and the strategy to gather all the materials for the design process is a major issue. Even though the authors of this article had a semi-structured interview with the designer team member, the methodology of preparing the inspirational materials is not well described.

In addition to the selection criteria of these materials shaped by experience, real user experiences and whether the materials have a guiding effect can be studied with different methods in future studies. In this sense, an experience-centered and user-oriented design development can yield better results with a defined tool.

In summary, the center designed by I-AM for Enerjisa is important in terms of creating an exemplary design solution with its implementation difficulties, transparency discourse in the design process, and supporting user-oriented approach.

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