

## FRAMING IN DESIGN: A FORMAL ANALYSIS AND FAILURE MODES

Vermaas, Pieter (1); Dorst, Kees (2,3); Thurgood, Clementine (2)

1: Delft University of Technology, Netherlands; 2: University of Technology Sydney, Australia;  
3: Eindhoven University of Technology, Netherlands

### Abstract

This contribution presents a formal description of the design practice of framing and identifies two general modes in which framing can lead to failure in design projects. The first is called the goal reformulation failure mode and occurs when designers reformulate the goal of the client in a design task and give design solutions that solve the reformulated goal but not the original goal. The second is called the frame failure mode and occurs when designers propose a frame for the design task that cannot be accepted by the client. The analysis of framing and its failure modes is aimed at better understanding this design practice and provides a first step towards arriving at criteria that successful applications of framing should meet. The description and the failure modes are illustrated by critically considering an initially successful case of framing, namely the redesign of the Kings Cross entertainment district in Sydney.

**Keywords:** Framing, Design Theory, Design methodology, Failure modes

### Contact:

Dr. Pieter Vermaas  
TU Delft  
Netherlands, The  
p.e.vermaas@tudelft.nl

Please cite this paper as:

Surnames, Initials: *Title of paper*. In: Proceedings of the 20th International Conference on Engineering Design (ICED15), Vol. nn: Title of Volume, Milan, Italy, 27.-30.07.2015

## 1 INTRODUCTION

One of the powerful practices in the toolkit of designers and design thinkers is the framing of a design task, that is, the creation of a new perspective on a design task. Whereas in more traditional engineering design methods the emphasis was on the modelling of how designers solve the design tasks as they are set by clients, later, after the seminal work by Donald Schön (1983), design methods started to explicitly include the notion that designers need to reformulate the design tasks as given, and are often seen to distance themselves to a degree from the formulations by which clients present these tasks. This enables designers to creatively explore design tasks, break free of suggestions how solutions should look like that can come with the clients' formulation, and in this way broadening the solution space. This reformulation of design tasks is called 'framing' or 'reframing', and is now a prominent part of current design methods (e.g., d.School, 2011; Hekkert and Van Dijk, 2011; Dorst, 2015).

There are various sources for determining what framing is. One can return to Schön, one can analyse how it is spelled out in current design methods, or one can consult work in which framing has been studied more theoretically (Cross, 2006; Dorst and Cross, 2001; Dorst, 2011; Dorst, 2015). These sources all share the perspective that the use of framing by and large always leads to successful reformulations of design tasks; that by framing designers arrive at better and more innovative solutions and can overcome deadlock in design projects, as design tasks as set by clients are often ill-structured (Simon, 1984), wicked (Rittel and Webber, 1984) or just plain paradoxical (Dorst, 2006). In the literature one can find many discussions of design cases with framing that are in these senses successful. And although these discussions suggest that less fortunate cases may also be available, the possibility that framing may fail in a design project is more or less not considered, let alone studied. In order to improve the design practice of framing, we need to understand instances of when it goes wrong.

This contribution presents an analysis of framing with the aim to better understand this design practice and to explicitly define ways in which it may fail to be successful. It gives a somewhat formal description of framing and identifies two general modes in which framing can lead to failure in design projects, thus providing a first step towards arriving at criteria that successful applications of framing should meet. The description and the failure modes are illustrated by critically considering an initially successful case of framing, namely the redesign of the Kings Cross entertainment district in Sydney, Australia (Dorst, 2011; 2013). This design project has recently had an unfortunate sequel that calls into question the quality of the original frame, thereby demonstrating the need to better understand how to apply the design practice of framing successfully.

In Section 2 we introduce this case and in Section 3 we give our analysis of framing. In Section 4 two failure modes of framing are defined, and in Section 5 we reconsider the sequel of the Kings Cross design project.

## 2 FRAMING KINGS CROSS

For setting the stage, first a design project is described in which framing plays a pivotal role. This project is the redesign of Sydney's night-time entertainment district in Kings Cross (Dorst 2011, pp. 528-530).

Being the main night-time entertainment district in Sydney, Kings Cross has increasingly become a setting for antisocial behaviours and escalating crime. High volumes of young people attend on Friday and Saturday nights, and activities are predominantly concentrated on a small stretch of nightclubs. Some of the problems that occurred include drunkenness, violence, petty theft, and drug dealing. Previous attempts at solving the problem by the City of Sydney included the implementation of strong-arm tactics and the increasing of police presence; however, the additional security measures failed to enhance feelings of public safety and instead resulted in a grim atmosphere for all.

In 2008 designers from the Designing out Crime research centre<sup>1</sup> were asked by the City of Sydney to look into these issues and propose ways to reduce crimes and misdemeanours, in particular 'alcohol-related violence.' The designers concerned quickly realised that the situation had previously been

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.designingoutcrime.com/>

treated as a law-and-order problem requiring law-and-order solutions; however, the people involved were not actually criminals. Instead, they were just young people looking to position themselves in a social setting and to have a good time. The lack of structure of the nightclub together with the sheer volume of young people meant that they were becoming bored and frustrated, and consequently were not having a good experience at all – a problem only exacerbated by the additional security measures. The designers proposed a simple analogy in which large volumes of people already successfully come together and interact in a harmonious fashion: a music festival. They effectively reframed the problem by comparing the dysfunctional situation at Kings Cross with a well-organised music festival. They asked themselves what they would do if they were organising a music festival and this triggered new scenarios for action, as a well-organised music festival offers many facilities that are not currently available in the Kings Cross district but could easily be designed in. The designers worked in conjunction with the local government authority for Sydney to execute a variety of solution directions. One example was to organise transport. In a music festival, people would be able to get there but also leave when they want. In the entertainment district, train services ended around the same time that peak influx of patronage begins. Apart from the obvious improvement of providing more trains at the nearest station, the designers also implemented a back-up system of temporary signage to lead towards a different nearby station that has trains running all night. In all, about 20 ideas/solution directions resulted from this single frame of the ‘music festival’, and over a space of five years many of these have been trialled and implemented. These include the introduction of friendly ‘Kings Cross Guides’ that welcome visitors into the area, provide information on all the facilities and also double up as extra eyes and ears for the police, providing an early warning to officials when a situation looks like it might get out of hand.

The Kings Cross case shows how the creation of a new frame provides an entirely new approach to a complex problem situation, rather than attempting to generate solutions to a problem that cannot move forward in its original terms. A full description of the Kings Cross scenario and its resolution can be found in a previous paper by the second author (Dorst, 2013).

### **3 MODELLING FRAMING**

For arriving at a more formal description of framing that can be applied to other design projects as well, one can use the case of the redesign of Kings Cross and abstract from its specificities.

Let a design task be captured by a situation  $S$ , a goal  $G$  that is to be realised, and possibly also a frame  $F[T]$ , where it still has to be spelled out what this frame consists of. The situation  $S$  is a current state of affairs. In the described case,  $S$  is the original situation in the Kings Cross district, including the regular crimes and misdemeanours that take place in it. The goal  $G$  is the state of affairs that the client wants to realise. In the Kings Cross case,  $G$  is the situation that the City of Sydney envisages, that is, a situation in which the rate of crimes and misdemeanours is much lower as compared to the original situation  $S$ .

#### **3.1 Frames**

Schematically one can take a resolution of a design task as an action  $A$  by which a current state of affairs  $S$  can be transformed into the envisaged state of affairs  $G$ . Designers create this action  $A$  by exploring and evaluating solution directions, and designers arrive at these solution directions by analysing the current state of affairs  $S$  and by drawing from their knowledge of how to transform states of affairs. Framing can now be taken as characterising the current state of affairs  $S$  as resembling a particular type  $T$  of states of affairs with the aim of making solution directions available, namely those solution directions that are regularly applied to states of affairs of type  $T$ . Returning to the case: when the original situation  $S$  of the Kings Cross district is characterised as a situation of the type “crime scene”, then this framing of the entertainment district suggests all kinds of possible solution directions associated with crime. For instance, for realising a more peaceful situation  $G$ , policing actions  $A$  come to mind such as surveying the area more severely, or banning first or multiple offenders. When, instead, the original situation  $S$  is characterised as being of the type  $T$  of a (poorly organised) “festival area”, other possible solution directions come to mind, associated with the organisation and management of festivals. The same goal  $G$  of a peaceful district can then still be realised, but now through alternative actions  $A$  that come with the management of festivals, such as

providing information about transportation and introducing friendly ‘Kings Cross guides’ for assisting visitors of the Kings Cross district.

In this schematic description of designing, a frame can be modelled as the set of possible solution directions  $A$  for realising goals  $G$  in a state of affairs  $S$  that designers make available by characterising  $S$  as being of a type  $T$  of states of affairs. This modelling of a frame is rather operationalistic by black-boxing how designers arrive at frames; it simply identifies a frame with the role it plays in design, namely providing designers suggestions for solution directions to realise the goal  $G$  (Dorst, 2015). The value of this modelling does not lie in helping designers to find the frames or the solutions, but in identifying failure modes of framing, which will be the topic of Section 4. The introduction of the concept of types  $T$  of situations is motivated by the relation between metaphors and framing as can be found in the work by Schön. According to Schön framing in design may be analysed as taking a specific design situation  $S$  as being of a type  $T$  of situation, and doing so enables designers through their experience with past situations of that type  $T$  to arrive at solution directions.

### 3.2 Framing steps in design

A simple modelling of a design process with framing can then be as follows. This process starts with a design task  $(S,G)$  as set by the client: the client presents a current state of affairs  $S$  and asks for means to transform it into a desired state of affairs  $G$ . The designer then frames this design task by taking the current situation  $S$  as of being of type  $T$ , arriving by this step at a framed design task  $(S,G,F[T])$ . The frame  $F[T]$  provides the designer with actions  $A$  as possible solution directions to obtain the desired goal  $G$ , which are then explored for their feasibility. An action  $A$  may involve the deployment of products (extant, or yet-to-be-designed), let us call them  $P$ , and if a specific action  $A$  is chosen as the right one for meeting the design task, then the designer also gives a design description of the products  $P$  part of that action. These products may count as the final design solution, yet with the increased acknowledgment that design is about creating product-services, it may be more appropriate to model the design solution as the pair  $(A,P)$  of the accepted action  $A$  plus the products  $P$  involved.

This modelling is too simplistic to capture the rich design practices that lead to the creation of new frames. Designers may also reframe design tasks by either abandoning a frame they themselves introduced when initially framing the design task, or by taking distance from a frame that is suggested by the client. Clients may already steer the design process by including in the formulation of the design task possible solution directions. The City of Sydney, for instance, already presented the task to redesign the Kings Cross district as one of reducing crimes and misdemeanours, and in this way put the focus on finding ways to prevent visitors to the district from breaking the law. Both steps of reframing can be modelled as a map from an initial framed design task  $(S,G,F[T])$  to a reframed design task  $(S,G,F[\check{T}])$ , where  $\check{T}$  is the new type of situations  $S$  is taken to be. Adding these steps to the modelling of framing implies that the design task as set by a client may be captured by the pair  $(S,G)$  when the client does not frame this task, and may be captured by the triple  $(S,G,F[T])$  when the client does frame it.

A second broadening of the modelling is including the possibility that a designer when considering a design task as set by a client, not only considers alternative ways to characterise the situation  $S$  the client presents but also alternative formulations of the goal  $G$  the client has. This reformulation may involve making this goal  $G$  more precise, making it broader or replacing it by an underlying goal that is taken to be the motivation for the client to adopt the original goal  $G$  in the first place. In all these cases the original goal  $G$  is replaced by a new goal  $\check{G}$ .

One can most probably add more reasoning steps for arriving at even more sophisticated models of framing; one can, for instance, include that designers can formulate themselves potential design tasks for clients (d.School, 2011). For finding two failure modes of framing the current modelling however suffices. So, let us take stock and take the design practice of framing as consisting of three types of steps (see Table 1). In a project the designer can take some or all of these steps, take a single step more than once, and do so in any order.

*Table 1. Three framing steps;  $S$  = original situation,  $G$  = goal,  $\check{G}$  = reformulated goal,  $F[T]$  = frame,  $F[\check{T}]$  = new frame*

Goal reformulation in a design task:	$(S,G) \rightarrow (S,\check{G})$ or $(S,G,F[T]) \rightarrow (S,\check{G},F[T])$
Framing the situation in a design task:	$(S,G) \rightarrow (S,G,F[T])$
Reframing the situation in a design task:	$(S,G,F[T]) \rightarrow (S,G,F[\check{T}])$

The original design task as set by a client can be without a (suggested) frame, to be modelled as (S,G), or be with a frame, modelled as (S,G,F[T]). This initial design task can at the start of the design project by the designer be framed, reframed or goal-reformulated. And during the design project the designer may again reframe the design task or reformulate the goal.

It is important to note that we distinguish here between the act of designers *interpreting* a design task in terms of clarifying their understanding, and (*re*)*framing* a design task in terms of generating an alternative perspective on a situation. An interpretation of a design task in isolation does not necessarily lead to solution directions, whereas framing, through its comparison to a desired situation, should lead the designer to solutions. Importantly, one could have an erroneous interpretation of the client's needs, which would inevitably lead to failure modes of their own.

### 3.3 Design solutions

For extending the modelling to the final design solution, one can add two more reasoning steps (see Table 2).

Table 2. Two additional design steps; A = action, P = product

Action identification:	$(S,G,F[T]) \rightarrow A$
Product identification:	$A \rightarrow P$

The step of identifying the action A demonstrates the role of frames in finding the design solution since it is the frames F[T] that make available solution directions to designers from which or through which they can identify an action A to realise the goal G. These additional two steps are not further considered in the analysis where framing can go wrong.

In Figure 1 three paradigmatic schemes of design projects are given, a first with only framing, a second with goal reformulation (and framing) and a third with reframing.

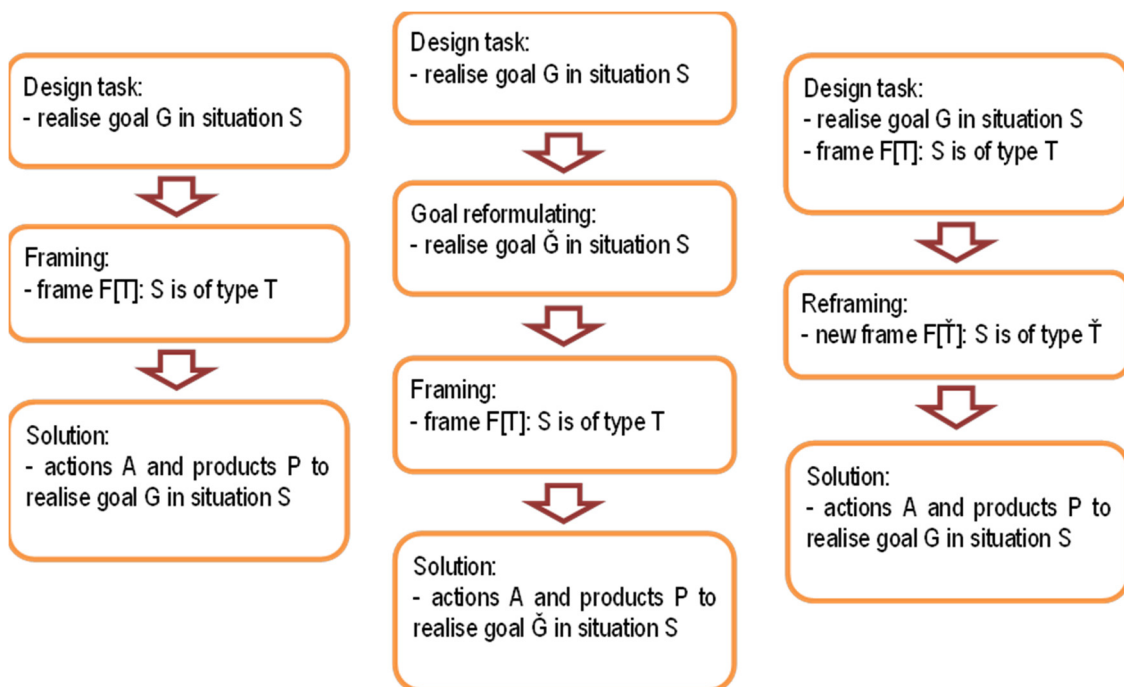


Figure 1. Three paradigmatic schemes of design projects with, from left to right, framing, goal reformulation and reframing

## 4 FAILURE MODES WITH FRAMING

How can framing go wrong? There are many ways in which a design project as a whole can fail, ranging from spending too many resources while finding a solution to not finding a solution at all. Two general ways in which a design project can fail are relevant to the question of what failure modes in design projects are introduced when the tool of framing is used. The first mode is that a project

leads to a design solution – actions A and products P – that does not realise the goal G as set in the design task (S,G) or (S,G,F[T]), and this possibility becomes realistic when a designer reformulates the goal G in the task. The second failure mode is that the design solution cannot be adopted by the client because the client cannot carry out the actions A or use the products P as intended, and this becomes imaginable when a designer introduces or adjusts a frame F[T].

#### 4.1 The goal reformulation failure mode

The first failure mode that a project leads to a design solution that does not realise the goal G is of course a generic one, and may not be specific to framing. It can however be argued that the step of goal reformulation is making this failure mode rather realistic, even if one assumes that the design process is always successful by leading to a solution to the reformulated goal  $\check{G}$ . With framing as modelled in the previous section, a design project leads to a solution to a design task (S, $\check{G}$ ,F[T]) or (S, $\check{G}$ ,F[ $\check{T}$ ]) and that opens up the possibility that the client may observe that this solution does not realise his or her original goal G.

Let us call this first failure mode the goal reformulation failure mode.

Goal reformulation failure mode:

- The design solution (A,P) solves the reformulated goal  $\check{G}$  but does not solve the original goal G.

If we further unpack this mode, three cases can be discerned.

First, the reformulated goal  $\check{G}$  can be a more precise description of the original goal G that the client has set. Say, the City of Sydney in the Kings Cross case has the goal G to bring the number of public disturbances down and this goal is reformulated as getting the number of crimes and misdemeanours down. Non-criminal disturbances are then no longer addressed in the design project, say visitors getting aggressive, sick or overly noisy. When a successful design solution is found for this reformulated goal  $\check{G}$ , the original goal is still not realised: the City of Sydney may take the design solution as a failure because the number on non-crime and non-misdemeanour incidents remains as they are.

Second, the reformulated goal  $\check{G}$  can be a broader description of the original goal G. Say, getting the number of public disturbances down and improving the time to identify these disturbances. In principle the goal reformulation failure mode is now blocked, since a design solution that realises the broader goal  $\check{G}$ , realises by definition the original more limited goal G. Yet when that reformulated goal is partially realised, failure may again surface. The elements that are added to the original goal G to arrive at the reformulated goal  $\check{G}$  may have been achieved well but the original goal less. Consider, for instance, a design solution that swiftly and adequately warns when a public disturbance takes place but less adequately prevents them from happening. The City of Sydney may then again conclude that this solution does not serve the original goal G well.

Third, the reformulated goal  $\check{G}$  can be an underlying goal that reveals motives of the client to set the original goal G in the design task. Say, the City of Sydney is motivated to get the number of disturbances down because of the political or public outcries about what happens in the Kings Cross district. A design solution to such an underlying goal  $\check{G}$  need not be a solution to the original goal. For instance, a public relations strategy that convinces politicians, the media and the general public that the Kings Cross district is a relatively well policed area and much safer for visitors than, say, daily traffic during Sydney's rush hour, could be valid for assuaging the public's concerns about Kings Cross. However, this strategy may backfire when the public disturbances continue and are again dominating the headlines in the media. The original goal G then may resurface and the City of Sydney is faced with the fact that this goal was not addressed in the design solution to  $\check{G}$ .

#### 4.2 The framing failure mode

The second failure mode for framing is that a design solution (A,P) cannot be adopted by the client because the client cannot carry out the actions A or use the products P as intended. Superficially it may seem that this failure mode should not occur anymore in contemporary design. Since the analyses of Donald Norman (1990) of the operation of sliding doors and other products with unintelligible interfaces, the usability of products has enjoyed continuing attention in design. And the introduction of new products and services is currently typically accompanied with careful programs to make the required actions known to users. This is illustrated by the impressive global achievement that within a

couple of years all air travellers have learned to check-in for flights, a procedure that used to be carried out by the airlines companies themselves. Framing or reframing could however introduce new ways in which clients can be faced with design solutions they are unable to adopt. Return for this again to the case of Kings Cross.

By framing the Kings Cross district as a festival area and not as a crime scene new solution directions do become available to the designers, but this change of frame also implies taking distance for existing solution directions that came with the old frame. This taking distance from the existing approach may indeed be seen as the benefit of the new frame, yet it also can make the adopting of the design solution found with the new frame problematic. Taking the Kings Cross district as a festival area suggests, for instance, also selling alcoholic drinks on the streets of Kings Cross. However such a suggestion seems less suitable given the association between alcohol and violence, the very behaviour the designers are trying to prevent. Regardless, such solution directions need not compromise the reframing of Kings Cross: since they are manifestly not contributing to realising the goal of reducing the number of crimes and misdemeanours, and will soon be dropped if designers would even mention them to the City of Sydney. Other suggestions that come with the new frame and that are adopted by the City of Sydney may however turn out to be problematic as well. Consider, for instance, the grim looking bouncers in front of and inside clubs and the more authoritative police officers that in the original situation patrolled the Kings Cross district. They came with the old frame and may not have been very effective, but the bouncers and police officers are now part of the Kings Cross district. The new frame instead suggests adding staff to Kings Cross – the ‘Kings Cross Guides’ – that informs, guides and assists visitors, and that may consist of more open and communicative young people, visible by colourful uniform clothes. The new frame also suggests reducing the number of bouncers and police officers or minimally transforming their role to one of servicing rather than policing. And this solution to the Kings Cross district may be hard to adopt by, for instance, the Sydney police. The Sydney police are present at Kings Cross because there are often public disturbances in that district, and the police are required to be there, since it remains their task to prevent such disturbances or to arrest the people involved, ‘music festival’ frame or no ‘music festival’ frame. Designers may convince the City of Sydney and its police of the benefits of a different perspective on the area, and the Sydney police may acknowledge these benefits, yet the consequential change that is required in the behaviour of the police may be harder to achieve. One may argue that by its core values the police are unable to unconditionally adopt the new frame, and are prone to return to the old one as soon as public disturbances will actually take place, as will be the topic of Section 5.

Abstracting from this case, one can argue that a new frame  $F[\check{T}]$  introduced by designers in a design project has to be acceptable to the client: the client should agree with characterising the initial situation  $S$  as of type  $\check{T}$  and this characterisation should be compatible with the values the client has. If not, a design solution obtained within the new frame may fail to be adoptable to the client. Let us call this possibility in which a design project may lead to failure the frame failure mode:

Frame failure mode:

- The client does not adopt the design solution  $(A,P)$  by not accepting the frame  $F[\check{T}]$ .

It is a mode that to our knowledge has not been studied as such, and for giving a typology of this mode, as we did for the goal formulation failure mode, further analyses and further cases are needed. For this analysis the literature on framing in the political sciences may be a useful source (e.g., Lakoff, 2004; De Bruijn, 2014). Hans De Bruijn, for instance, analysed debates in politics as guided by frames. Participants in such debates set up frames to present their views – the most well-known case being the “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” frame the U.S. President George W. Bush used in 2001 to rally support after the 9/11 attack. Participants are then facing the choice to accept the frames of their opponents, stay with their own frames or set up alternative ones. “Stepping into a frame” of opponents is in this literature taken to be disadvantageous since it forces participants to accept the perspective of the opponents. Returning to designing, one may analyse (re)framing in a design process as a proposition to the client to “step into the frame”  $T$  or  $\check{T}$  the designers identified, leading to the question under what conditions a client is capable or willing to accept the frame.

### 4.3 Avoiding failure

Both failure modes may in practice be avoided if designers regularly brief clients about the way they develop the original design task. And by introducing moments in this process at which clients and designers reconfirm explicitly the precise design task that will be addressed.

For example, within design agencies, notably in product design, there is the practice of creating a ‘Return Brief’ before contracts are signed and a design project starts. Such a Return Brief describes how the designer understands (and interprets) the design task and plans the project in accordance with this understanding. The creation of a Return Brief is not a neutral undertaking: it often quite clearly holds the seeds of the reformulation of the client’s perceived goals and reframing of its initial frame.

Within design research, authors like Bryan Lawson have gone further and actually stated that briefing is “a continuous process” in design (Lawson and Dorst, 2009), possibly as an expression of the ‘co-evolution of problem and solution’, that is now widely accepted as being one of the core processes driving creative design.

And indeed, some empirical studies do seem to point to this: the design problem is kept fluid (within bounds) through all of the conceptual phase of the design project, and only really gets fixed at the moment a solution concept is chosen and approved for moving into embodiment design and implementation. However, with one noted exception in the field of Visual Communication (Paton and Dorst, 2011), there have been no elaborate empirical studies into these design practices. This is a grave omission, as the ability to reframe design tasks is now considered to be a key design tool and one of the cornerstones of the design thinking-movement in business schools and design schools.

## 5 REVISITING KINGS CROSS

For making specifically the second framing failure mode more concrete, we return for a last time to the case of redesigning the Kings Cross district. Unfortunately, in 2012 and 2013 a tragic course of events occurred that calls into question the validity and appropriateness of the imposed frame and that actually annulled the effect of the earlier design interventions in Kings Cross. Over the space of a couple of months, two separate incidents happened that severely shocked public opinion and resulted in direct Governmental intervention. In these incidents, both in the Kings Cross district, two young men were attacked by impulsive aggressors; they sustained a sudden ‘single-hit’ to the head, then cracked their skull as they fell on the pavement and died.

These tragedies and the public outcry that followed spurred the New South Wales Government (under which Sydney falls) into action, and new laws were passed that severely limit the opening times of pubs, bars and clubs in Kings Cross and surrounding parts of central Sydney.

One could argue that this response by the New South Wales Government is itself a case of wrongful framing: the Government felt duty-bound to respond to the outcry in the media that considered these two horrible incidents to be exemplars of ‘alcohol-related violence’. This framing makes reducing the alcohol intake of people in the area by limiting the opening times of pubs and clubs seem a logical cause of action. However, the two incidents that these laws seek to address both were not related to an excessive intake of alcohol at Kings Cross at all (both occurring early in the evening, by perpetrators that had been drinking at home). Thus, the new laws would not have prevented the tragic deaths, and unfortunately will not prevent such events happening in the future. The framing that supported the Government’s response can therefore be taken as suffering from the goal reformulation failure mode: the new laws may make that visitors drink less alcohol at Kings Cross (the reformulated goal  $\tilde{G}$ ) but might not avoid future incidents of this type (the original goal  $G$ ). These critical points do, however, not take away that the design solutions made available with the festival frame also might not avoid such incidents. (For making some progress on this point it may be noted that there is in fact a pattern here: both incidents were linked, in the sense that both perpetrators were into muscle training and Martial Arts – the excessive consumption of muscle-building amphetamines and hormones might have contributed to their sudden aggression, unlocked by a small amount of alcohol – but the banning of such widely used substances has not been considered.)

These new Government regulations have devastating effects: young people now avoid the Kings Cross area altogether, and party in other parts of the city just outside the exclusion zone. Kebab shops, convenience stores, restaurants, and bars in Kings Cross are no longer profitable, they are now closing



their doors and unless something happens, this downward spiral will continue. Soon only the organised crime/drugs/prostitution-related businesses will be left in the area.

The net consequence of this tragic course of events and the Governmental response to it is that the solution for reducing the number of crimes and misdemeanours as derived by the designers with the new festival frame cannot be adopted anymore by the City of Sydney. The earlier choice of the City of Sydney to approach the Kings Cross district with this new frame has effectively been overruled by the New South Wales Government, forcing it to return to the old 'crime scene' frame and the use of strong-arm tactics for policing the district. Hence, the Kings Cross redesign project fell prey to the framing failure mode; the City of Sydney no longer adopts the design solutions (A,P) since it no longer will (or can) accept the proposed frame F[ $\bar{T}$ ].

One can analyse this failure in two ways. One can still say that the original 2008 project was successful, and reject that the reframing failed. One may, for instance, argue that the City of Sydney did accept the new festival frame and the design solution as found by it. And one can point out that the tragic events were not due to the situation at Kings Cross as created through the project, since the perpetrators got into their aggressive state outside the Kings Cross district. Moreover, the solution direction paid off in another way because since the project at Kings Cross, the City of Sydney has created a broader strategy called 'Open Sydney' to implement changes in other areas in the city that are similar to the ones the design project has led to for King Cross. Hence, the City of Sydney is now reinventing itself as an active framer and conductor of life in the city – effectively reformulating its goals as an organisation. Therefore, the original frame was a success of some sort.

An analysis that is more susceptible to failure is one in which it is accepted that the frame was apparently too weak for the City of Sydney to hold on to for the Kings Cross district in the face of the tragic deaths of the teenagers. In such an analysis it is accepted that this district is an intrinsically open area in which people may turn up that have already drunk elsewhere or are otherwise affected by drugs. And in such an analysis it is accepted that Sydney is part of New South Wales, with a State Government that also has a say about measures to be taken in Kings Cross. From this broader perspective the festival frame as proposed by the designers has proven to be acceptable to the City of Sydney at the time of the project (2008) but has proven to be unacceptable in the long run.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

In this contribution we have considered the design practice of framing and presented a formal way of describing it. Our aim was to better understand this practice and to explicitly define ways in which it may fail to be successful. We argued that there exist two modes for framing to fail, which we called the goal reformulation failure mode and the frame failure mode. By the first mode framing fails when designers reformulate the goal of the client in the design task and give design solutions that solve the reformulated goal but not the original goal. By the second mode framing fails when designers propose a frame for the design task that cannot be accepted by the client. We illustrated these two failure modes with the case of the redesign of the Kings Cross entertainment district in Sydney.

The existence of these failure modes does not imply that framing is not a powerful design practice. Through framing, designers can arrive at creative and effective solutions to design tasks, as the Kings Cross case shows. Yet this example also demonstrates that framing is not a practice that inevitably leads to successful design solutions; care and critical evaluation are needed to steer the framing process in the right direction.

The analysis in this paper creates an initial understanding of this, and opens up a more critical research agenda on framing. We need to investigate what would be the criteria for a 'good' or perhaps 'strong' frame, and these insights in turn could lead to recommendations on how the framing process can be conducted well. The wealth of cases of framing that is available in design research is a good starting point for such research, and as mentioned, also the literature on framing in the political sciences may be a useful resource. Also, further research might lead to the identification of other failure modes than the two described here, eventually leading designers to employ this tool with even more sophistication and success.

## **REFERENCES**

- Cross, N. (2006) *Designerly Ways of Knowing*. London: Springer.  
Dorst, K. (2006) Design problems and design paradoxes. *Design Issues*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 4-17.

- Dorst, K. (2011) The core of 'design thinking' and its application. *Design Studies*, Vol. 32, pp. 521-532.
- Dorst, K. (2013) Shaping the design research revolution. In: Lindemann, U., Venkataraman, S., Kim, Y.S., Lee, S.W., Clarkson, J. and Cascini, G. (eds), 19th International Conference on Engineering design; Proceedings Volume DS75-01: Design for Harmonies. Seoul: Design Society, pp. 173-182.
- Dorst, K. (2015) *Frame Innovation: Create New Thinking by Design*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, forthcoming.
- Dorst, K. and Cross, N. (2001) Creativity in the design process: Co-evolution of the problem-solution. *Design Studies*, Vol 22, pp. 425-437.
- D.School (2011) D.School bootcamp bootleg. <http://dschool.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/BootcampBootleg2010v2SLIM.pdf> (accessed May 25, 2013)
- De Bruijn, H. (2014) *Framing: Over de Macht van Taal in de Politiek*. Amsterdam: Atlas Contact.
- Hekkert, P. and Van Dijk, M. (2011) *Vision in Design: A Guidebook for Innovators*. Amsterdam: BIS Publishers.
- Lakoff, G. (2004) *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate: The Essential Guide for Progressives*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Lawson, B. and Dorst, K. (2009) *Design Expertise*. Oxford: Architectural Press.
- Norman, D.A. (1990) *The Design of Everyday Things*. New York: Perseus.
- Paton, B. and Dorst, K. (2011) Briefing and reframing: a situated practice. *Design Studies* Vol. 32, pp. 573-587.
- Rittel, H.W.J. and Webber, M.M. (1984) Planning problems are wicked problems. In Cross, N. (ed) *Developments in Design Methodology*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 135-144.
- Schön, D.A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. London: Temple Smith.
- Simon, H.A. (1984) The structure of ill-structured problems. In Cross, N. (ed) *Developments in Design Methodology*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 145-166.