

Better by Design Conference ([www.betterbydesign.org.nz](http://www.betterbydesign.org.nz))

Auckland, 30-31 March 2005, New Zealand

Report by [Annick Janson](#)

The high-profile Better by Design conference was boldly aimed at changing the way New Zealanders think about design. It was a unique effort, at a high level of engagement, to effect a deep change in attitude and behaviour toward Design. [Tom Peters](#) commended us for taking up the challenge. WOW.

How does one design large-scale change? Through public relations and communications, of course! A passionate Helen Clark, New Zealand Prime Minister, talked not only about degrees of must and should do better by design, but added we can and moreover we will.

Jim Anderton, NZ Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Industrial and Regional Development, furthermore described this conference as a springboard to a new way of working. He supported the launch of a national, design-led business strategy. Both Anderton and the PM gave strong clear messages that the NZ government is serious about design. (Better by Design is administered by the government's economic development agency, [New Zealand Trade and Enterprise](#), but is guided by independent design-led business experts, the [Better by Design Advisory Board](#).)

Jeremy Moon, [Icebreaker](#) CEO and Chair of the Better by Design Advisory Board, described this conference as the first step in a journey of cultural change which our nation as a whole is embarking upon. This endeavour is unique in at least two ways. Initially, it implies surfing the new economy wave while designing the surfboard (or rather a novel contraption?) we are on. Secondly, it represents a unique opportunity to develop collective leadership capability, which the conference organisers embraced. This is depicted below in the mosaic of portraits of the visionaries who created the movement by putting their ideas together and acting on their beliefs.



Better by design: Collective vision(aries)

[IDEO](#) President and CEO talked about redefining the role of designers in not only products but also organisational and human processes. To harness new creative powers, IDEO developed a cross between focus groups and brainstorming which they coined unfocus groups. Inter-disciplinary teams such as social psychologists, ethnographers and engineers designed, in addition to products, new environments around the human interactions they observed. Partnering with its clients, IDEO helped them redefine the very core of their businesses. In this process, IDEO also redefined itself as a designer of these organisations rather than a designer for other organisations.

One by one, narratives of design-led paths and business transformation unfolded. [Peter Zec, President, Design Zentrum Nordrhein Westfalen](#), Germany demonstrated how sophisticated corporate communications coupled

with innovative design adds value. He was followed by other storytellers-practitioners from the New Zealand innovation forefront, such as Fisher & Paykel Appliances, Formway, Macpac, Navman, Methven and Icebreaker.

It was disappointing that the audience was not more actively called to engage during the conference itself. In one activity, however, we were challenged to write (and wear) a personal statement about the Design movement on special T-shirts. Post-conference solutions were offered to accompany people in their change journey. These included design audits, mentoring, internships, special project funding, academic fora and other organisational tools. These solutions suggest practical tools for building competency and getting the right kind of help along the way. They offer different possible action path and are result oriented.

Among the academic speakers, Simon Fraser, [Victoria University School of Design](#)  
Research Director  
[Excelerator ? New Zealand Leadership Institute](#)  
University of Auckland Business School  
Auckland