Studio workflows.

Successful studio workflows unite a collective of united, passionate designers that respect (and trust) each other's skills. Everyone is working towards a shared goal within a shared culture.

A team based culture can work across any workflow: here's three examples.

Directed teams.

Traditional studios are built around directed teams. A task is set, completed then the designer awaits another.

A design manager of a **directed team** typically:

» heads a dedicated group of designers
» sets project objectives for individuals
» assigns tasks to those most competent
» takes responsibility for each individual's output
» heads all communication – it's top-down from leader to individual team members.

Traditionally the design studio manager directs the teams but it doesn't need to be that way. Even a designer in a small studio can form sub-teams, and share the responsibility of leadership. Taking ownership of small projects is a great way for junior designers to learn leadership and management skills.

Self-directed teams.

Self organised teams share leadership. Individuals contribute to the work flow and no one waits to be told what to do. The design management role is more facilitation rather than delegation.

A design manager of a **self-directed** team typically:

» facilitates communication across team members.
» focuses on building teams with complementary skills
» allows individuals to take responsible for their own output and accountability
» fosters collective work and shared accountability
» focuses on group insight.

It's worth recognising that collaboration and democratic design may not come naturally to all designers.

It can take time to nurture a self-directed team but the advantages are many: the design manager is freed to take on other activities, while designers learn leadership and management skills.

Agile teams.

Agile teams may be spread throughout an organisation or assembled for specific tasks. They are focused on research, design, iteration and repeat. Pushing something out fast, seeing what works, improving it and repeating the process.

A design manager of an **agile team** typically:

» creates a space where people are willing to share their talents
» assembles teams of complementary skills, to seek mutual goals
» supports and facilitates rather than leads
» fosters a group leadership.
» is one part of an integrated team with shared accountability.

Choosing the right workflow.

Different workflows produce different results for different projects. Every studio has traditional clients needing traditional transaction design skills. In that case a directed team may produce the work economically and effectively. On the other hand, if a client is wanting to work collaboratively, a self-directed or agile team will always be the best solution.

Collaborative workflows.

The value of working collaboratively are varied:

» designers communicate more effectively, because they collaborate and share ideas more often
» complimentary skills make for more efficient workflows
» sharing responsibility and tasks can make for a better sense of a better quality of work-life
» it's democratic, everyone has ownership of a project
» responsibility and wisdom are shared
» results can be more empathetic because they're built from multiple perspectives and backgrounds and that can provide a deeper level of understanding of the problem.

Exploring different workflows can be messy, and it may not always work. It's about having the courage to try something new and iterate if it doesn't work.

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