You come in from the street past strange-looking characters on the sidewalk. Then you see this old building. You're wondering: “Is this the right place?” You’re supposed to be meeting some of the field’s top designers. You go through the door and up the stairs, and it’s kind of scrappy in there too. Finally, you open the door and step into this beautiful, redesigned interior . . . and you feel safe. This is all as it should be. You should be worried . . . because that’s what you are buying—an idea you could never come up with yourself, something you didn’t know you needed. In our work, we create the correct balance between new and safe.

—Rasmus Ibfelt, Director and Partner, e-Types

It is 9:07 a.m. on a Wednesday morning, time for the weekly design meeting at e-Types, when the company shares, evaluates, and celebrates work in process or near completion. The latest Euro Rap CD plays on the stereo upstairs. A few employees hustle through the heavy door that divides the rough exterior world from the modern interior office space (see Exhibit 1), toss coats onto a rack, and head for the kitchen. Others who have already been at work wander down a wide staircase to refill coffee cups. Everyone collects in rows on either side of the long white tables where they all lunch together. A few take up posts at the smoking bar, where they can listen in on the meeting.

Jonas Hecksher, designer and partner, places several boards face down on the tables and lights a cigarette. Søren Skafte Overgaard, managing director and partner, stands before the group with Rasmus Ibfelt, director and partner (see Exhibit 2 for partner bios).

RASMUS: You all know that three weeks ago e-Types was invited into the competition to create a new visual identity for Team Danmark. In 48 hours we have to present our idea. It’s been a stressful time, with lots of projects going on, so we haven’t involved most of you in the process. But we want you to be in on the final decision.

Team Danmark is a prestige client. It’s in your face on television. It’s something we’d like to tell potential clients we’ve done. We really want to win this one. It’s also important we do something we are proud of and that is true to what we believe. Jonas, you want to share the design?

JONAS: Okay. Jonas begins to turn the boards faceup on the tables. Everybody leans in to see. TD communicates to the public three ways: a logo for clothing, a website, and a monthly magazine. It’s important that we design a machine to tell the whole story. TD isn’t just the Olympics. It’s about elite
athletes. So we took the rings to represent individual athletes and made them big, so they can move around, change, be animated on the website (see Exhibits 3 and 5). We used red and white colors like the Danish flag. We made a modern look so when they go to the Olympics, they will have cool new jerseys to wear. Jonas points out the designs for the magazine, the webpage, and so on.

JESS, graphic designer: Cool. I like it. Other designers join in affirmations.

RASMUS: We also give them the option to add specific logos for the different events they support, like the Olympic rings or the European championship logo. Rasmus points to the board with logo variations. Søren insisted we at least give them an option on the rings, and I think it’s good. I’m happy with how it turned out.

SØREN: The question is, will the new design work for the client.

ALLAN, strategist and designer: Rectangles are hard to place on the body. I’m not sure how it will work for clothing. It works great on paper. Maybe they could choose to only use the rings, without the frame?

ANNETTE, strategist: I think this design is too wild for them. As I read Team Danmark’s strategy, it’s about team spirit, discipline, and unity. They won’t go for this.

RASMUS: It’s a risky design, but I think it’s pretty brilliant. There is a system to the design that allows us to expand the TD identity over time with the magazine, the website, ad campaigns, and so on. I have a good feeling about it.

SØREN: I agree with Annette. This design is too radical. TD asked for an evolution of their design, not a revolution. They want to keep the elements and colors of the existing design.

JONAS: It’s impossible to make a design if we follow TD’s rules. The old logo is the Olympic rings and a torch. You can’t make this in a new way! You can change colors, except you can’t because the colors are the red and white of the Danish flag; you can’t add blue. You can make a beautiful torch. But you can’t do anything with five rings locked together—that is a logo in itself.

SØREN: I agree that if you stay inside the client’s limit, it’s boring. But if we go too far outside the limit, the design is too crazy and it won’t be realized. We have to find that magical place where TD will go a little further than they thought they could, but we don’t take them so far out that they won’t dare to cross the bridge.

RASMUS: Here’s the classical design we did, following TD’s rules. Rasmus holds up a small color sketch of a revised TD logo. People gather around. No enthusiasm. (See Exhibits 4 and 6.)

JONAS: We did the classical design first, and it’s bad. So we took a chance to try something different, to get ideas out of doing something crazy. The classical design, it’s not beautiful. Five rings is a logo in itself. You can make a beautiful torch, but that’s it. We tried to work with these things . . .

SØREN: Jonas, I have to believe you when you say you can’t work with these elements, but it might be possible we gave up too soon on using the Olympic symbol.

RASMUS: I know Jonas. When he gets the feeling that an idea isn’t interesting and he’s not able to move it anywhere, we lose his creativity. Besides, nobody really knows how important these Olympic rings are. We didn’t do any research comparing brands. Maybe TD is a strong brand in itself.
SØREN: The sponsors love these rings because there is a convenient confusion element. People see the rings and think Olympics, and the sponsors get the Olympic symbol cheap. It’s much cheaper to get the Olympic rings on my oatmeal box by sponsoring TD than by sponsoring the Olympics.

ANNETTE: If we want to win the competition, we should show them both the classical design and the revolutionary one.

JONAS, holding up the classical design sketch: This is not a job from e-Types; it could be from anywhere. We shouldn’t show it to anybody.

SØREN: Jonas, you decided to kill the classical design in the way you worked with it. How selfish do we want to be? When we talk to our clients, we say we want to help you . . .

JONAS: If you do what they want you end up with a design that looks like 100 other companies. It’s not special. It’s like producing 100 of the same people who look and think the same.

RASMUS: We always want to create something the client would never know to ask for. The new design is a great design! It is true to what e-Types stands for. Maybe this is wrong for the client, but on the other hand the design could move TD in a great direction.

ALLAN: I think we should present both designs, to show the client the stretch between the classic design, which they asked for, and the creative design, which offers so much more. This will show them we are willing to invest ourselves, give them more than they asked for, and give them our creative process, a process they will be part of if they choose us. That’s really what the client should buy into. Let’s make them curious about what we can do in a process.

SØREN: If we go with the new design we are taking a big risk. We have a 20% chance of winning this competition with the new design, 80% chance of winning with the classical design.

ANNETTE: They probably will go with the safe design, but we have shown them that there are other possibilities. Once we win the competition, maybe we can get in there and work with the TD strategy and create a third design that pleases us both. They gave us a strategy that we don’t agree with, so of course we can’t make a design we will both agree on. Strategy and design need to go together. I mean, why are we in this competition anyway if we don’t agree on the strategy?

RASMUS: This is the problem with competitions. We aren’t allowed access to the company for research and strategy work. It’s difficult to break the rules when we don’t have a relationship with the client that would allow us to develop the idea with them.

SØREN: We just discussed this issue last week—now that we are having success, what kind of company do we want to be? Which projects should we accept and which decline?

JONAS: Right. Why win the competition and maybe earn a little money, but not that much, and make a thing that doesn’t have any meaning, that we don’t want to show to anybody? Every time it’s on TV I’ll be thinking, “Oh crap, I did that.”

SØREN: It’s possible that even if we lose the competition with the new design, we will earn “integrity currency.” But how much cash flow currency can we sacrifice for respect currency? Sometimes the currencies work in the same direction, but sometimes you have to choose.

JONAS: Let’s be like the medieval knights—it’s not about money, it’s about honor.
RASMUS: This is a business. It’s about money. I think the main question is what Søren just said, “What kind of design company do we want to be?” After 10 years, how can we still be the ones who break the rules while also being established so we can cash in on our hard work?

SØREN: If we had a deficit, we would have to be more pragmatic. But we have good cash flow right now. We can take the decision that we feel is right.

JONAS: You know what I think.

RASMUS: I think we have a good story for the new design. In the long run we will get better designs by respecting our vision.

SØREN: Okay, maybe the creative gods of this world want us to worship this design. I admit it looks great. If this is the kind of company we want to be, then I will be loyal and back it up. I will write a presentation to explain the concept and be as positive as I can.

RASMUS: Maybe we’ll take the classical one with us as backup, see how it goes. Okay, thanks for your input everyone. The project leaders will put our heads together and make a final decision. Let’s get back to work. We’ve got a dozen projects to finish this week.

“Smash the World”

We do identity, the full range of identity from graphic design to who is the company and how they should answer the phone. We don’t do everything ourselves, but we come up with the idea of the company, how they should look and speak. We explain it to people who work for them. We make a story for the company that they can use as a trampoline.

—Jonas Hecksher, Creative Director and Partner

Five graduates of Denmark’s Designskole started e-Types in 1997 as a graphic design firm with particular expertise in typography. From the beginning they displayed an edgy sensibility, deriving their name from the way food additives were labelled on food packages (“e-216,” for example) and conceiving their work on new typography as “additives to design.” A newspaper article that announced the firm’s arrival ran under the headline “Ass-Kickers and Cowboys.” Idealistic and unimpressed with recent design trends, the founders of e-Types aimed to “smash the world.”

With little business expertise but big passion, the friends and partners threw themselves into the work, overloading with new projects, staying late into the night, eating meals together, living in the office. Success came quickly. In 1998 and 1999 the dot-com boom kept e-Types supplied with projects; start-up companies needed help with graphics and other visual identity features. Even though marketing was mostly word-of-mouth, the company could barely add staff fast enough to keep pace.

When the tech boom went bust, e-Types had cash in the bank and no outstanding debts. As business slowed and partners realized they had achieved their initial goals, disagreements emerged about the future. To Ibfelt, this time was painful: “We were not businesspeople; we were not professional that way. It was all about feelings.” By the end of 2000, only three of the original partners remained, Hecksher, Ibfelt, and Jens Kajus. The company had run out of energy and clients. Something had to be done.

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1 By 2006, e-Types had designed more than 200 new fonts.
In early 2001 e-Types formed a working relationship with Wetware, a “strategic identity agency” run by a “group of bright guys who wanted to study the world and give back to it,” as Overgaard, then a Wetware partner, put it. Wetware’s four partners shared a strong belief that working life and personal life could be interconnected and that “you could make money off of what is fun and interesting.” Well connected in the (bubble-proof) public sector, Wetware’s partners helped e-Types restart the flow of incoming jobs. The two firms worked well together; their collaboration on a high-profile project for Learning Lab Denmark earned accolades for both firms.

On January 1, 2002, Wetware and e-Types merged to become e-Types A/S. Wetware gained an enhanced ability to produce impressive tangible outcomes—graphic designs—to go with already well-respected strategy and identity consulting services. e-Types designers gained an improved ability to present business-oriented explanations of their work, to weave a story together with their visuals. Ibfelt reflected:

We wanted to smash the world, and now here were four new guys who were doing it in their own way. We approved. We got new energy; we got more professional. We got new competencies, but with the same culture. We were a lot brainier than before. Suddenly we had a new way of promoting ourselves. We could now write an article about how we saw the world. We could go on television and speak about a new way of working. This created a lot of new projects and attention.

The seven partners agreed on a high-level objective: They wanted to be number one and create outstanding results. High-profile new projects began with Georg Jensen, Aarhus Business School, and Aquascutum in London (see Exhibits 7 through 11 for samples of e-Types’ work). The firm returned to growth mode, hiring designers, project leaders, and an administrator. The new partners helped refine the e-Types business concept, expanding the firm into a brand agency, with a mission that included designing corporate identities, advising companies and other organizations on identity, and brand positioning and strategy. Business school-trained strategists worked with designers to develop core ideas from which to create brand strategy and graphic design, integrating these disparate parts of each client’s identity and differentiating clients from their competitors. The firm’s new managers refined the company’s operating characteristics also. They instituted its first-ever organizational and operational structure (though they still did not write much of it down); new workers required supervision and a degree of certainty that would at least assure reliable delivery of paychecks. Increased salary overhead created new pressures to keep jobs coming in.

By 2003, the stresses of growth and success turned into serious disagreements. The partner who was then managing director proposed an e-Types merger with Kontrapunkt, a much larger firm and competitor. The goal was to achieve position in the international marketplace by becoming the largest design agency in Denmark. But the three design partners, Ibfelt, Hecksher, and Kajus, opposed the plan. They worried that the company would lose its “smash the world” edginess in fusing with a larger company. Despite objections, a subset of partners continued to negotiate with Kontrapunkt in secrecy, leading to a spring 2003 bombshell: Three of the original Wetware partners would leave e-Types for Kontrapunkt. Of the former Wetware partners, only Overgaard remained, assuming the role of managing director. A period of crisis management ensued. And what had seemed like a murky future soon turned into a revitalization of the company. New senior strategy people were brought in, and all employees were involved in a redefinition of the company brand platform stressing a two-legged strategy of increased professionalism combined with edginess.

2 “Wetware” is a reference to the 1984 cult novel Neuromancer by William Gibson; it depicts a future in which people connect their nervous systems (their “wetware”) directly into a global electronic network. The novel anticipated the emergence of the Worldwide Web; it remains to be seen whether its ideas about “wetware” interfaces will come to pass also.
Growth soon returned. By the end of 2005, the number of employees had doubled and the firm had reasserted itself in brand strategy, corporate identity, and graphic design. It attracted big clients: Carlsberg Breweries and Levi-Strauss among others. In terms of revenues, 40% of the business now came from corporate identities (new logo, brand platform, etc.), 40% from traditional design jobs (book layout, brochures, Web design, typography), and 20% from image campaigns (photo shoots, ads for luxury brands, etc.).

### Management Structure and Business Model

In 2006, four partners owned the private limited company called e-Types A/S. The four participated full time in daily work, carried equal status in the company, and made decisions jointly at weekly meetings. Each of the four partners had a different focus in the areas of design, finance, and strategy. They shared financial information informally but had begun to create a system for sharing more formally and getting financial information out to all employees.

Employees included designers, technical assistants, brand strategists, researchers, and administrators. Most people specialized in one or more areas but took on other roles as necessary. Designers, brand strategists, and directors sometimes served as project managers, and one designer took charge of IT systems. In the absence of any formal reporting structure, employees turned to one or another of the partners for assistance, depending on individual inclinations. Administrators tended to consult the managing director, for example; designers tended to go to creative directors.

Everyone worked in the same large room, with partners positioned at the perimeter where they could oversee activity. People regularly crossed project lines. Planning took place every Monday morning. If people had extra time, they were assigned to projects in need of resources, but this rarely happened because everyone was usually overwhelmed by work. The creative directors often became bottlenecks because they were involved in almost every project. There were no middle managers; partners made all major decisions, whether they concerned strategy, projects, or day-to-day issues.

### Fun, Finance, Fame, Forward

e-Types partners considered four criteria when deciding whether to take a job, which they labeled “Fun, Finance, Fame, and Forward.” They summarized the criteria in four questions:

1. Will it be fun for us to do?
2. Will it be financially rewarding?
3. Will it expand our reputation and earn us respect?
4. Will it challenge us to develop our skills in a new direction or help us establish new client relationships?

Sometimes they made trade-offs among these. A project that cost more to do than e-Types could reasonably bill the client might still be worth doing if it was very high profile or promised to be the first in a series of jobs for an important client.

Except when e-Types partners agreed to a fixed project budget (as they did occasionally), the company billed by the hour, adding a premium to the cost of services. The partners determined a reasonable premium on a client-by-client basis, depending on the value of the services being provided and the attractiveness of that client. An 80,000-person company might use a graphic design
for 20 years in ads and magazines, on billboards, and on stationery. In such cases, e-Types assumed that the brand identity they supplied would provide great value for the client. Such a client, probably a well-known international company, would also have a very attractive ability to pay for future work. And, doing work for them would generate favorable reputation effects. Management also considered how ambitious a project seemed, how far it might stretch them. Partners tried to weigh all of these factors in arriving at a markup for e-Types services. If the client agreed to pay a higher rate, e-Types strategists and designers could invest in a more in-depth process, committing more time to research and exploration that might lead to higher-quality outcomes. They preferred to work this way.

e-Types also made money from competitions. Competitions were risky; they cost as much as a contracted job but did not guarantee recovery of expenses. A lot of big design projects got done as competitions between four or five agencies. Firms that lost get little or nothing, regardless of how much they spent. But when a company won a competition, the prize helped it recover some of the losses in other competitions. Overgaard thought of competitions as a marketing investment. e-Types did not advertise, but the firm could gain fame by winning competitions.

Because of its excellent reputation, e-Types often got work “over the transom,” cold calls from firms that wanted to hire the company. “There’s always a temptation to just answer the phone and work for people who want you,” explained Overgaard. Partners nurtured long-term relationships with a lot of people over time, and sometimes these became work for the firm. The company also sometimes took on small jobs, such as brochures and Web designs, which helped smooth the flow of work. Work was plentiful, but as Overgaard noted, “We haven’t come to the point yet where it’s difficult [to book us].”

In an effort to manage some of the uncertainty associated with job flow, Overgaard created a yearly budget. The budget was highly speculative, because he knew only the project work for the next six weeks and maybe a few larger projects scheduled for further out. Overgaard said, “The only thing you can rely on is that up to this point it’s always worked out.” If the unthinkable happened—the phones suddenly stopped ringing and profits vanished—the firm could pay employees for a few months from a reserve retained for that purpose.

Costs were mostly fixed: salaries, materials, rent, travel, and the daily company lunch for all employees. Rent was low—e-Types had established itself in a bad neighborhood, now turning chic. They had spent a lot of money in 2005 renovating their space inside the building. Salaries were by far the biggest expense (e-Types paid industry-competitive salaries). In this sense, the profitability equation was simple: As long as the workforce size roughly matched the incoming workflow, e-Types made a healthy profit.

“Everyone wants to be part of success,” observed Overgaard. “No one wants to spend three times more hours on a project than the company is paid for.” He had proposed a regular Thursday morning meeting for project managers to discuss which projects were more or less profitable and why—not to point fingers but to learn from experience. He wanted to keep financial logic strongly present in project management. This plan to promote financial awareness called for beginning these discussions with project managers, then gradually involving everyone in the company. Ibfelt was less convinced that everyone should be engaged in the financial side of the business:

Sometimes you have to forget the structure and the money and have some people who can inspire the most creative people. Without them we would have nothing. Even if Søren says in a meeting every week this project is good or that project is bad, because of money or hours, [designers] won’t care because this is not their motivation. We have to have a balance between the people inspiring the company and being true to the professional company that needs to
earn money. I see myself as one who has to preach this religion. I fully agree with Søren, I’m just trying constantly to find balance.

At the start of 2006, however, the situation for e-Types was good. They could scale the workforce up or down flexibly (Denmark permitted companies to lay off and hire people relatively easily, unlike Germany, for example, where laws made it hard to let employees go). To handle surges in workflow, they sometimes hired freelancers, or the staff simply put in longer hours, working until midnight, on weekends, or through vacations to meet deadlines (partners realized this solution was short term).

As long as profits continued, noted Ibfelt, e-Types managers had a choice: “We can just give the partners more money, or we can invest in people.” In general, the partners had opted for investment, often taking hiring risks. Recently, two new employees with expertise in communications had been hired as an investment; no one knew for certain that there would be enough work to keep them busy. “We need these people to continue to develop,” Ibfelt argued, “so we have to find them projects.”

**Competing in the Danish (and European) Design Industry**

The Danish design community clustered around Copenhagen. Eighty percent of design firms had one or two employees; larger competitors included graphic design firms, advertising agencies (mostly Copenhagen offices of international agencies), and printing companies with design departments. e-Types differentiated itself from larger competitors by specializing in the identity business (Overgaard: “We do this 100%; we don’t have a machine to feed”) and by being “way more funky.” Many small companies also had a funky edge, but they had not invested in growth and consequently offered a narrow range of services. e-Types partners believed their ability to grow while keeping their creative integrity and funk factor set them apart from other firms.

Partners spent a lot of time thinking and talking about creative integrity. According to Overgaard, it came down to one main question:

> What kind of company are you? Do you just spend hours and if you don’t get the right idea just live with that? We want to go to a different place. We are contributing to the survival of the company, so maybe we should create awareness of how many hours it really takes to have success creatively and have a good project financially. So you don’t split the company with some people taking care of creativity and some people taking care of money. You have to get both logics to respect each other. Without both of them we aren’t a company.

At one time e-Types had been able to differentiate by knowing which other firms they were bidding against. But clients had stopped making this information available. At first frustrated by this new trend, e-Types partners ultimately found it liberating, because it empowered the company’s designers. Said Overgaard: “You have to run your own race.”

The partners had identified areas in which to expand services: writing text, designing book or magazine concepts, and designing websites for clients. They had recently hired two people to write text for clients and to work on strategy and identity from a communications perspective, which was different from the company’s traditional emphasis on what looks great. They had taken on the firm’s first photographic campaign for a luxury brand, which required that designers build an ability to select models, hire photographers, and organize photo shoots. They had begun developing two staff designers as Web design project managers and had hired an expert in printing and production to make sure great ideas translated into great output materials.
By taking these steps, e-Types hoped to be able to come up with even better “big ideas” that would enhance their reputation for top-level design work. “If it’s only about making things look good,” says Overgaard, “we can do that any day, but making something right for the client, to get something based on a strong idea, that is the difference between being a great design company and being a standard, off-the-shelf design company.” Having a strong idea, bringing to bear more holistic capabilities—these translated into profitability. When e-Types worked at the strategic level with a client, they could charge a higher premium.

Process and Culture

There is an “aha” moment—“I can do this!” That’s the best feeling. It’s like wonder. And you very fast realize you can do this and this and this—a whole lot more than the original idea. Maybe the first idea wasn’t that good, but it produces a lot of other ideas that make the idea better.

—Jonas Hecksher, Creative Director and Partner

e-Types stood out among its competitors because of its cutting-edge design. “We have some of the very best graphic designers in Denmark, maybe Europe,” explained Overgaard. “No one has designed as many typefaces as Jonas. He’s scary for other designers.” But the e-Types identity process and diversely expert workforce also set them apart: “It’s table stakes for us to make a beautiful design that looks good,” noted Overgaard. “What’s important is getting the right design for the client. We have a strong sense of what’s right for the client, or we get it through research and workshops and discussion with different people educated in business, journalism, and communications, as well as designers.”

In order to get the right design, teams at e-Types worked toward a “big idea,” a story that would inspire the client’s graphic and strategic identities and bring them conceptually together. Here the staff of mixed professionals became a unique asset, contributing ideas from across disciplines. Consultants challenged designers to think in ideas; designers challenged consultants to think in images. The result: a broad range of materials to explore, consider, and develop.

The process varied from project to project but always began with the client. A project leader (usually a strategist) met the client to investigate perceived needs and to discover the underlying problem. He or she asked clients: “Why do you want to do this project? What do you expect to get out of it?” When project expectations had been reasonably well defined and the client had agreed to a written proposal, the project team (typically a project leader, a strategist, and two or three designers) began the research and analysis phase. Strategists and designers interviewed employees and customers; led workshops; and researched the organization’s structure, behavior, history, and lore. If relevant, the team analyzed international trends, the client’s markets, or competitors.

Strategists and designers then worked from this analysis, often independently of one another, meeting regularly to share ideas. Sometimes strategy “led,” sometimes design did, but ideally the visual identity and the brand platform evolved together and supported each other. Overgaard said, “We’re not two companies or departments but professionals working together on corporate identity. Either side might lead. We try to have an integrated approach.”

Designers had preferred ways of working. Hecksher explained:

We like gathering a lot of information from everywhere. We put everything up on the wall, a lot of ideas and thoughts, all over. It’s a mess, because there is no “this way we have to go.” We are just open for everything. Nothing is wrong; it’s very important that you [let] loose your ideas and put them up so you can get some new ones. It’s very inspiring because some ideas
give you new ones that are better than what’s on the wall. At a certain point you have a form and you start to see a pattern in the ideas you come up with. As if it’s a movie—these are the basic characters, this is the story or the plot, the general idea—it becomes one story.

Hecksher referred to the big idea as the “story.” For any project they tried a lot of different story ideas. Team members tested a story by asking: Is it a good story? Is it the right story for the client? Does it fit their strategy? Can it be used for advertisement, labeling, websites, or wherever it is needed? Finally, and very important, will it be productive? Can it generate a lot of other stories? Will this visual identity grow over time and serve new products, new company strategies, and new forms of advertising?

While designers worked with images and typeface, strategists, like Annette Tingstrup, worked with words to create the brand platform: the central idea of the client’s organization, its personality and values, and the way they should be presented to the public. She explained: “The first thing I do after the interviews and workshops is write down my first impulses and put that away. Then I start to work with it very structurally. Putting it down, clustering it, different kinds of answers, to make the structural picture. What does this tell? I’m moving very much in the computer, putting all the answers together, moving them around.”

Tingstrup tried to stay open to new ideas, to get ideas beyond her own first impressions. Sometimes a valuable new idea would be close to her original idea; occasionally it would be wildly different. Through this process, Tingstrup created documentation to support the brand platform she proposed to the project team and the client:

It’s very important that I have the documentation so when I present the final picture I can tell the reason why it’s so. I have all the information from the interviews. It’s so because he said that, and so on, and all together this has turned out to this. . . . It’s not only, “I feel this is right for you.” It’s: “This seems to be right for you because of this and this and this.” You know why what everybody at first thought was the right thing to do actually isn’t the right thing to do.

The brand platform and the directions for the design program were integrated into a brand manual. e-Types then worked with the client to implement the guidelines for their new identity. The visual identity and brand platform aimed to meet three criteria: they should be realistic and ambitious and should contain a strong idea about the organization and its social role.

Designers and strategists aimed to serve the client, as Hecksher explained: “I am not doing all the jobs for me, I am doing them for my clients. I’m not an artist; I’m a designer. I work for a client. Of course you have to do it in your own style, but it’s important that it’s the client’s job.” At the same time, however, e-Types aimed to challenge their clients. Overgaard said:

The best projects we make are ones when people say, “This is what we’ve been thinking all the time, we just weren’t able to express it ourselves.” We dig deep into the soul and strategy of the company and find out how to express this in a way that is more themselves than what they would have been able to say themselves. It’s important that when we help create a corporate identity, people feel at home in it. They shouldn’t feel relaxed in it necessarily. You can make a “no-surprises” identity, but then you have no inspiration.

If the client was dissatisfied with the new visual identity or brand platform, e-Types opened a conversation about that. But different employees had different responses to client feedback. As a strategist, Tingstrup found it fairly easy to integrate feedback; she could have discussions with the client, gather new information, and make changes that met the client halfway. Designers were more inclined to try to “educate” a client, to help the client see why certain choices were made.
Although the e-Types process contained elements consistent from project to project, not very much in it was written down. In October 2003, the company hired a former project manager at Danish toy manufacturer LEGO to do a so-called industrial Ph.D. cofunded by the company and the Danish government. She led a project aimed at becoming more explicit about creative process, writing it down or diagramming it. To achieve this, she conducted interviews and workshops and also visited other design firms in Europe, the U.S., and Canada to see what process models other firms were using. This work had produced useful shared understanding and agreement on a codified formal process as well as a set of method cards describing and illustrating the most-used methods at e-Types. In practice, however, there was considerable variation in process, in part because there was wide variation in project outputs (Web page, photo shoot, etc.).

The e-Types Culture and Values

The e-Types culture had noticeable characteristics. The people at e-Types were always busy, working to meet deadlines, finishing tasks before catching a plane to London, trying to wrap things up for a workshop, struggling with challenging questions. Everyone worked on several projects at once, juggling priorities and coordinating internal communication as well as meetings with clients. e-Types naturally worked overtime—employees thought in ideas, not hours, though they took delivery and deadlines very seriously. The four partners believed that success resulted partly from hard work and agreed about the necessity of long hours to ensure the high-quality outcomes that enhanced the e-Types brand. The impulse to “do whatever it takes” to get a great outcome created some tensions, however, as project managers tried to get more assertive about budgets. Overgaard said:

That’s part of our culture, that it’s always about getting the good result. So it’s not like people are told very much from the beginning, “You have this many hours to do this.” I mean, the task is: Get a good idea for this. And as long as we can still make a profit, we are pretty happy about that. I guess on some projects maybe we could be better at using our time right, but you never know at the end, because which 50% of the hours did you spend wrong and which 50% did you spend right to get to the result?

Dedication to the critical task of getting the “right idea” earned e-Types the best clients. It was the “pitch” that got them the next job; it ensured that they would get follow-up assignments where they could make a higher profit.

Another e-Types characteristic: a history of competition among designers. The creative directors competed with one another on big projects and also with the younger designers. The two maverick creative directors pushed each other, good naturally, in an ongoing internal contest.

Cooking and eating together had also become part of the e-Types culture. Every day at noon, everyone (employees, clients, and guests) ate lunch at a long table in the kitchen. With people working busily toward deadlines, lunch could sometimes be a turbulent affair. But the food was always premium organic quality, nurturing, and a great energizer. One partner was a former chef, the managing director had published a cookbook, and the rest all loved to eat and talk about food.

e-Types sought out and attracted people who were curious and outgoing when it came to the arts, fashion, and nightlife. People went to gallery openings, fashion shows, and receptions together. Employees talked about events at lunch or at the Friday Bar, where employees and friends would drink a beer and then go to a gallery opening or some other interesting event. Recently, this pattern had altered slightly: employees of e-Types were starting to have children, which seemed likely to change some of the firm’s social patterns, though in ways that no one could yet predict.
The Team Danmark Competition

Team Danmark (TD) was founded in 1985 through legislation passed by the Danish Parliament. TD supported Danish athletes competing at international sports events, such as the Olympic Games, the World Cup, and the European Championships. After the 2000 Olympic Games, TD announced a new mission statement: “Denmark—the best place in the world to be a top athlete.” TD’s athletes achieved top results through expert support in sports medicine, nutrition, physical training, mental training, and counseling.

Financing for TD came from three sources: the state, the sanctioning body of the sport being sponsored, and business. TD had an annual operating budget of approximately DKK 125 million (roughly US$20 million). Seventy-five percent of the budget came from the Ministry of Culture and the Danish Sports Federation; the other 25% came from selling TV rights and from sponsor and marketing income.

On June 1, 2004, the Danish Parliament’s new act on elite sports took effect, strengthening the cooperation between the Ministry for Culture and TD. TD was placed in charge of the overall planning of elite sports in Denmark. They reorganized internal structure and were given 12 main tasks including overall planning, providing optimum training and coaching for athletes, recruiting, counseling and financially supporting national federations, cooperating with media and sponsors, and so on.

Visual identity had never been a priority for TD, but increased competition for funding prompted new leadership to make their look more appealing to funders and the public. The brief TD gave graphic design competitors focused on visual identity. Ibfelt explained, “It’s typical for companies not educated about design to think you can make a visual identity without doing the strategy part.” e-Types had three weeks to do their own independent strategy work on TD—less than ideal, but the project was too great an opportunity to pass up.

The Challenges Ahead

e-Types began with a bold mission, “smash the world,” and a passion for continually challenging what is expected and what was possible. The company had experienced growth, crises, and structural evolution. Their strategy was not written down or published on their website or in the employee handbook. But the partners had big visions and asked often, “What kind of company do we want to be?” The question confronted them with ongoing challenges.

Challenge the Establishment but Be Professional

The original e-Types design partners realized that they had to be more than “Ass-Kickers and Cowboys”; they needed to be professionals. Ibfelt said: “You would never talk to a client about smashing the world. . . . We wanted to work with corporate identity. When you work with corporate identity, you have to have big clients. It’s all decided in boardrooms and on the management level. So you need stability and professionalism.”

A related issue: Sometimes e-Types seemed too cutting edge for clients. Ibfelt acknowledged this: “We get very ambitious with clients.” But not every client wanted to be on the cutting edge. Often it took clients a year or more to catch up on a global trend already well established in the design community. e-Types employees could be impatient, sometimes pushing clients too hard toward designs for which they were unready.
But danger also lurked in the other direction. Now that e-Types had established itself as a successful agency with a solid reputation, Ibfelt concerned himself with shifting the balance back in the other direction—toward the edge:

I’m getting older and so are my partners, and we can’t be part of the underground anymore, so we need to hire people who are. . . . We need people who can do the job and are straight on designers or project managers, but we also need maybe 30% of the group . . . to constantly challenge the establishment, which also means me. . . . We need to take chances, challenge the way we do our work, spend money in areas that are not lucrative now. . . . I like the idea of being number one. If you are not number one or number two it’s not fun. So you hire people you wouldn’t normally hire, do projects you wouldn’t normally do, find new ways of promoting, do projects for nothing, maybe buy a gallery, do a fashion show. We’re not forced to do anything right now, so we have to put pressure on ourselves to go new directions.

To flex creative muscles, e-Types had recently done an internal project focused on making a “black book” of pictures taken by staff members at the office and on various trips around the world and put together with an eye to unexpected or playful connections between photos. It contained pictures, almost no text. Was it an effective marketing tool? Would it be given to clients? What was its purpose? No one quite knew the answers to these questions, but Ibfelt welcomed that: “We needed to do the black book—maybe it’s difficult to know how to use, but it was fun to do, it created the atmosphere in the company of being on the edge. [It said to us:] ‘We can still do it. e-Types has still got it.’”

The Challenges of Growth

Despite its success, e-Types increasingly ran up against the limits of scale. In spite of themselves, the partners became bottlenecks, holding back the work as they insisted on participating in every step of every project. They had to change their own style of managing, and other managers and designers needed to step up without any loss of quality in the work. Overgaard said: “It’s an important part of the company that the owners have been part of the projects all along and are used to doing really high-quality work. It’s hard to change to a role more like a coach and someone doing quality control—‘This is good, this is not good enough.’ “

As creative directors gave new designers more opportunities, they also needed to be ready to step in if the design was not good enough. Managing this was very complicated indeed. Overgaard explained how this kind of delegation in creative areas was far more difficult than ordinary management:

I create frames around what’s going on, hours, billing, deadlines, salary—simple stuff. On the other hand, if you are [managing] design, how do you influence people to work in the right way without telling them what to do, and how can you let go in that process? How do you avoid the temptation to give ideas or to change the idea, and if it’s still not right, do you do the same thing again, or do you take over and adjust? If [the partners] do that often, then has the person they helped learned?

e-Types was “only as good as its last job.” So each design created their image. “It’s one thing to make mistakes and internally correct them, but we can’t make mistakes with the clients and have [the new designers] learn by losing the client,” continued Overgaard. So the partners put a lot of thought into project staffing. Overgaard said, “Our hope is that people of the next level will do something better than [the creative director] and that the younger person’s design wins out.” It was often a challenge for a staff designer to work with a creative director whom he or she considered a role
model, so e-Types paid a lot of attention to designer development. “We have to breed a culture where people believe in themselves and compete with people they look up to,” Overgaard said.

Into the Future

Ibfelt liked to describe the history of e-Types as a series of crises and dramas, which he illustrated by drawing a turbulent line of peaks and valleys: “Everything has always been a bit chaotic. . . . We say we need some kind of drama every year. It’s been like that almost every year. And sometimes you get maybe two dramas per year, which may be a bit too much. It always gives us an opportunity to do something new. To maybe be forced to change the way we work.” But there had been no recent dramas, and that worried Ibfelt: “We make money, we have the best clients in the world, great employees, we can afford to do stuff we couldn’t before. Everything is okay . . . [but] drama is part of what keeps you on the edge.”

Ibfelt was confident that e-Types could become the biggest design agency in Denmark, establish an international reputation, and make a lot of money doing it. “But will it be fun?” he wondered. “Is it possible to be more international and not sell out? Is it possible to transfer our style, ‘copy ourselves’ in New York, London, Berlin? Can we find someone with the same set of values? . . . Are we willing to let people use the e-Types brand, giving up control of it ourselves? Or do we stay in Copenhagen as an elite organization and travel out for international jobs? Is that at all possible?”
Exhibit 1  e-Types Exterior and Interior Spaces

Source: Company. Photographer: Simon Ladefoged
**Søren Skafte Overgaard**  
Partner, Managing Director

Søren Skafte Overgaard holds a master's degree in Political Science and was educated at the University of Copenhagen and University of California, Berkeley where he specialized in international relations, national identity and foreign policy. He has taught at the University of Copenhagen and written about national identity and foreign policy in journals and books. He is an alumni of the Wharton Executive Education program and external examiner at Copenhagen Business School.

As managing director in e-Types, Overgaard has helped increase turnover significantly and create continuous surplus qualifying the company for the major Danish business journal’s “Gazelle” (profitable high-growth company) status in 2005.

At e-Types he has been responsible for corporate identity, branding and design projects for a.o. Danish National Police, Danish Ministry of Culture, Jordan dental, Suhr’s University College, Royal Danish Theatre, Georg Jensen, Royal Academy of Fine Arts School of Architecture, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Aquascutum London, 3XN architects, Danish Regions as well as a long range of competitions.

Before joining e-Types Overgaard was a co-founder, Partner, and later managing director of journalism and consulting agency Wetware A/S which merged with e-Types in 2002. Here he did branding and communications consulting for a.o. Aarhus School of Business, Learning Lab Denmark and Danish Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs, and journalism for a.o. Dagbladet Børsen, Wallpaper Magazine and Mandag Morgen weekly.

**Rasmus Ibfelt**  
Partner, Director

Rasmus Ibfelt holds a degree from Danmarks Designskole (Denmark’s School of Design), where he specialized in fashion design and branding.

Ibfelt is a co-founder of e-Types and has been with the agency since 1997. In e-Types he is responsible for Human Resources and the agency’s own branding. He is a popular speaker on issues of design and branding and is a member of the Danish Ministry of Culture’s council on education within design, architecture and the arts. He is also member of the Danish Fashion Institute.

In e-Types Ibfelt he is as well a designer, strategist and project manager on the identity processes. He has worked with a wide range of corporate identity projects and image campaigns for fashion and luxury brands, a.o. Framfab web consultancy, E2 Energy company, Astion, Daily Newspaper Dagen, Danish Associations of Medical Professionals, Danish Confederation of Industries, Levi’s, Georg Jensen, Aarhus School of Business, Aquascutum London and fashion designers Mads Nørgaard Copenhagen and Noir.
Jonas Hecksher
Partner, Creative Director

Jonas Hecksher holds a degree from Danmarks Designskole (Denmark’s School of Design) and École supérieure d’arts graphiques et d’architecture, Paris, where he specialized in graphic design and typography design. After working as head of design on Torpedo magazine, Hecksher co-founded e-Types in 1997, where he has worked ever since with a wide range of projects within corporate visual identity, typography, design of newspapers and magazines as well as image and branding projects for fashion and luxury brands. Among others, he has worked with such clients as Danish Film Institute, Framfab web consultancy, E2 Energy company, Astion, Daily Newspaper Dagen Danish National Police, Danish Ministry of Culture, Jordan dental, Royal Danish Theatre, Royal Academy of Fine Arts School of Architecture, Aquascutum London, Danish Regions and the Rzeczpospolita newspaper in Warsaw Poland.

Hecksher is a four-time recipient and two-time nominee for the Danish Design Award. He has also been awarded a Distinctive Merit from Art Directors Club N.Y., a certificate of excellence in Type design from Type Directors Club N.Y. and is one of the only Danish designers that have been nominated for a silver award at the British D&AD and was selected for the D&AD annual 2003. Furthermore, Denmark’s leading business weekly has ranked him among Denmark’s 100 most talented people under the age of 35.

Jens Kajus
Partner, Creative Director

Jens Kajus holds a degree from Danmarks Designskole (Denmark’s School of Design), where he specialized in graphic design and typography design.

After working at Danish design consultancy Bysted, Kajus joined e-Types in 1998 where he has worked ever since with a wide range of projects within corporate visual identity, typography, design of newspapers and magazines as well as art-related projects and catalogues.

In e-Types Kajus has worked with corporate visual identities for a wide range of clients, among others: Georg Jensen, Aarhus School of Business, Framfab web consultancy, E2 Energy company, Astion, Daily Newspaper Dagen Danish National Police, Daily Newspaper BT, Jordan dental, Royal Danish Theatre and a number of projects for Carlsberg. He is on the jury for the Danish Design Award in the period 2004-2007.

Kajus is a three-time recipient and a two-time nominee for the Danish Design Award. He has also been awarded a Distinctive Merit from Art Directors Club N.Y., an award from Type Directors Club N.Y. and was one of the only Danish designers that have been nominated for a silver award at the British D&AD.
Exhibit 3  

e-Types Team Danmark Logo

Source: Company
Vedrørende design af brevpapir

Exhibit 7 Samples of Work Done for Georg Jensen

Source: Company
Exhibit 8  Samples of Work Done for Dagen

Source: Company
Exhibit 9  Sample of Work Done for Aquascutum
Exhibit 10  Samples of Work Done for Hotel Fox

Source: Company. Photographer: Simon Ladefoged
Exhibit 11  Samples of Work Done for Carlsberg, Jacobsen Microbrewery