IC Culture Handbook

An Insider’s Guide to Idea Couture’s Ever-Evolving Culture

/San Francisco /Toronto /London /Mexico City /Shanghai
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WHO ARE WE?

Contrary to popular belief, we are not any of the following: an advertising agency, management consultancy, fashion house, model agency, interactive agency or art gallery.

WE ARE

A PASSIONATE TEAM COMING TOGETHER TO CREATE CHANGE.

Namely, a strategic innovation, customer insights and experience design firm. We help clients harness design thinking for purposeful innovations and transformations that truly improve the state of the world. For half a decade, our eclectic team of design-thinkers, anthropologists, economists, and technologists, futurists, sociologists and artists has tackled some of the toughest challenges for some of the world’s most admired companies.

IN AN ORGANIZATION WITH TRANSFORMATION INGRAINED IN IT'S DNA, IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO WRITE AN EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK. A mission as big as ours has no instruction manual for how things are done. That also means there's no limit to what you can become here. We created this book to give you a sense of our culture, work style and passions. Most rules are made to be broken, so we've saved you the trouble and skipped that part altogether. View this as a guide and let common sense and intuition lead your way.

d a n a , I T W O U L D B E I M P O S S I B L E
About Us

why Idea?
Ideas are everywhere, waiting to be drilled into. Ushered by awareness and empathy, we chase the evolving frontier of innovation all over the world, seeking white space opportunities, amplifying weak signals, and developing creative solutions to take businesses to greater heights. An idea is nothing if it can’t be articulated and acted upon. Brilliant thinking that can’t be executed has no purpose. This is where elbow grease comes into play.

We create the opportunities our clients need in order to activate an emotive chain reaction and put it to work.

why Couture?
You wouldn’t wear a shirt that didn’t have all of its buttons, and we wouldn’t outfit our clients with solutions that weren’t tailor-made. Whether it’s creating a new product idea, service, or business model, we weave structure, detail, compassion and an elevated design aesthetic into the fine fabric of our operations. Off-the-shelf solutions don’t inspire change. Companies yearn to be seen as unique entities that require humanized, handcrafted ideas. When our products walk down the runway, you’ll know.

Our Origins
Idea Couture was founded in 2007 by Idris Mootee, Scott Friedmann, Cheesan Chew and Keith Lui. They dreamed about a new kind of professional service firm, designed to solve the highly complicated and often wicked problems emerging in industry and society. They believed that strategy doesn’t live in a PowerPoint or Excel document – strategy needs to be visceral, tangible, human, emotional and sustainable. They also believed that businesses should be the agents of change and progress, by encouraging the spread of technology, improving productivity, powering human imagination, adding a third bottom line, enhancing quality, and making products and services more humanistic.

Since then, Idea Couture has grown to become a radical voice of dissent in the design and consulting worlds. We have several major offices located around the world, and hire new employees every month. We’re blessed to work with some of the largest pharma, healthcare, technology, consumer electronics, financial services, consumer packaged goods and media companies in the world.
You’ll see, hear and live this saying every day at IC.

/rethink/reimagine/reset

Strategic innovation forces us to tear apart our preconceived notions, challenge our comfort zones and trust our ability to build new and controversial work. Out of date theories are designed for yesterday’s problems. Our work serves an unknown future that doesn’t operate within an existing set of rules. The future is not predictable, so we need a new, empathetic worldview – one that respects employees, shareholders and the environment in the modern world. We love sharing unprecedented perspectives with our clients.
Why use just one side of the brain, when you can use both? d-school + b-school™ is the marriage of two opposite yet symbiotic ways of thinking. Our interdisciplinary methodology merges the imagination of a creative and design agency with the analytics and acumen of a business consultancy.

Alongside experts in

/DESIGN,

/ENGINEERING,

you’ll face projects ranging from exploring

/ECONOMICS,

business white space to new product

/HUMANITIES

development to corporate transformation.

/AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES.

Our integrative approach gives rise to

creative solutions that recognize and

embrace complexities, contradictions,

uncertainties and paradoxes.
A Luxury BRAND

Think of names like Hermes, Burberry or Mercedes Benz, and many qualities come to mind. A headstrong dedication to perfection in details. A commitment to quality in any circumstance. A culture of prestige that taps into human emotion. Our clients expect the same from IC. We want to bring them the feeling of falling in love. Each and every idea we deliver must emulate our high standards of value. Think unconventionally. Design strategically. Deliver stylishly.

Fast, Sharp DECISIONS

In photography, the term 'decisive moment' refers to the point at which the entire story of action is crystallized into a single instant. This is the moment we snap into action to capture the gems that are so easily lost.

"People know what they want because they know what other people want."

Terry Adorno, Sociologist
Guidelines, not rules

CALL US CRAZY, BUT WE DON'T BELIEVE THAT HARD AND FAST RULES HELP YOU ACHIEVE YOUR FULL POTENTIAL.

Work gets done in this "anything goes" environment because we hire smart, autonomous individuals who enjoy working in a matrix reporting environment. We are proud and protective of our culture because we believe it fosters great work. Your presence and opinions are now a part of that. However, we're always seeking to improve ourselves. Let us know when there's a better way.

Please view our office as gathering place to socialize, share ideas, create dreams and act on them. We want you to feel comfortable being yourself, whether that means wearing funky clothes or bringing in your pet. Imagination and quirkiness power our work. In many places, people have to stifle their imagination, empathy and creativity. Here, all we ask is that you check your ego at the door.
"Ingenuity" is the price of entry. We work at the intersection of substance, style and speed. We want vigorous business solutions packaged in sophisticated frameworks, and we want it two minutes ago. Being a hyper-specialist in one field throws people on a hamster wheel and makes for a grand waste of time. So instead, we've adapted a global philosophy that merges American creativity, European elegance and Asian productivity.

Prepare to jump to and from projects, pack your bags for a trip, or bid farewell to an idea on short notice. Everyone thinks and works outside their job descriptions, so expect to play many roles. You never know what new skills you'll learn and what contacts you'll make.

Some projects require laser-like focus, while others call for a flexible army knife.

"Continuity" is abnormal. "Combinations" are unexpected. IC houses a wealth of skilled, knowledgeable and passionate individuals. When we get together, great ideas happen. Powerful change results from unexpected combinations of people placed together to work on a demanding project. At IC, we don't have time to launt our skills in a meeting or brainstorming session. We don't believe that the loudest voice should dominate the conversation. You'll find an opportunity to push your limits, try to break them, and don't be afraid to ask for help.
office

“Intuition” guides us
We work on a 09 to 05 schedule, but you’ll see people coming and going at all times of the day. We expect your best work, but trust you to know how, when and where that happens. Our open offices are designed for optimum ideation, collaboration, discussion and debate, but we also have quiet spaces for mediation, reflection and that vintage activity known as ‘silent work.’ Go where the energy works for you. Just make sure your team knows where you are and how to get in touch with you.

“Context” depends on the project
Sometimes employees will find it more productive to work from home or a café (look for the “Working From Home” status on their Gchat). You’re welcome to do so, but check with your project managers and project lead, and be accessible via email or phone should they need you.

However, we recommend you spend most of your time at the office because big ideas and learning opportunities are born through collaboration with people from other disciplines.

“Interaction” breeds knowledge
As you’ll soon discover, there are a lot of perks that come with the IC experience. We celebrate birthdays with cake breaks, take group lunches, enjoy weekly treats, and break open some booze on the last Friday of the month. These events are opportunities to socialize, share your thoughts and learn about work your colleagues are doing. If you feel something is missing, then make it happen. Try first, then ask for permission.

“Credit” is earned
Idea Couture is a meritocracy. It doesn’t matter where you come from or what your advanced degree says you’ve done – you’ll need to prove your capabilities to the team by dealing with problems you’ve never encountered. At IC, seniority doesn’t mean a fancier title. It means being invited to participate on projects with greater complexity and ambiguity, or being trusted to run projects yourself. These challenges won’t be handed to you, so expect them to come as the result of hard work & trust.
Creativity is in the bones of our business. It is embedded into how we work and live every day. You won’t find a creative director here – creativity is not propriety, but part of our culture. Every approach we take is goal-oriented play, we live every day to zoom in and pull back to extract the most meaning from our data. Play and imagination are balanced with rigor and analysis.

"Courage" every day

We step out of our comfort zones to come up with groundbreaking ideas other companies wouldn’t dare conceive of. You’ll engage with some of the biggest companies in the world, coming to us with their toughest problems. We’re not interested in the path of least resistance, but rather getting the heavy lifting done, with time to spare.

The biggest mistake a new IC’er can make is expecting that he or she, alone, should be able to answer every problem all the time. Sometimes courage means the willingness to ask for help. The messy problems we solve can bring out challenging constraints in our work and ourselves. There’s always room to find another point of view. Try and find the right balance between pushing your comfort zone and reaching the point of no return.

"Confidentiality" beyond the grave

We distinguish ourselves from competitors with stellar ideas, so when you’re outside the office, mum’s the word. We have code-names for a reason. Keep your work and belongings in safely locked places and use a shredder on company-related materials and creative assets. Ask your Project Manager about the proper handling and disposing of material you’re unsure about.

"Intersections" creates ideas

Great ideas spring from the intersection of business and design, behavior and technology, or empathy and economics. They require new forms of stimuli, and that is our value as an organization. If you don’t have new input to push your ideas further, gain some inspiration by having a conversation with an anthropologist, using a tactic from our Innovation Toolkit, or referencing our scan archive.

"Creative" goes without saying

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You're probably familiar with many famous bears throughout history. We think it's time for some new faces, so let us introduce the IC d-school and b-school bears! Like every employee at IC, each customized bear has a unique style and swagger. One of the first things you'll do when you get here is design your own and add it to our collection.

/Take a bear,

/Dress a bear,

/Share your bear,
Success

What does it take for someone to be successful at IC? If the following activities stoke your fire, you’ll probably blaze a trail here.

/ Inventing something
/ Communicating creatively
/ Taking leaps of faith
/ Playing
/ Humanizing work
/ Challenging assumptions
/ Trumpeting change
/ Practicing compassion
/ Making great ideas better
/ Taking responsibility
/ Working in a team
/ Sharing a different perspective
/ Saying yes
/ Saying no
“Your standards are too high.”
Standards can never be too high to strive for.

“That’s not in my job description.”
You’re right—you were hired to...

“I am very creative.”
Everyone is creative here. Patting yourself on the back isn’t going to get you very far.

“I want to be an innovation strategist.”
It is not what you want, it is whether you’re ready.

“I want to lead a project.”
See above.
When you’re ready, you’ll get your chance.

“It was MY idea.”
No it’s not.

Ideas are born of a process, and the team that surrounds you were a part of that process. It either “our” idea, or it’s the client’s idea that the process produced.

“I thought someone else was doing it.”
Our projects are too complex and detailed to leave any assumption to chance. Get clarity and talk to your lead.

“This is how we did it at my old job.”
We strive for innovations, not re-creation.
Our clients have unique needs that we approach with a fresh eye, so please check preconceived notions at the door.

“I want to be on the cover of M/I/S/C/ magazine.”
No employees can be cover models regardless of how attractive or stylish they look.

“This really frustrates me.”
Chances are, it will frustrate other people too. Take action. Design a process. Make a tool. Do what it takes to fix what’s broken and ask for forgiveness later.

No one will ever criticize your drive.

“I internal stuff doesn’t have a deadline.”
Internal projects shape us and improve our work. And the “client” has very high standards. So treat these projects with the utmost respect.

“Just get a designer to make it pretty.”
Though they’re remarkably good at it, other people aren’t there to make your work more attractive or creative. They have busy schedules and projects that make it impossible for them to make a PowerPoint or proofread every article.

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