Hans Neubert, Frog's chief creative officer who broadened the consultancy's mission from “Design” to “Advancing the Human Experience,” has departed for the digital agency Huge. The surprise part: Frog will not replace Neubert with a new CCO.

Frog is one of the largest and most storied design consultancies in the world, and it has always been defined by its chief creative officer. In 1969, Hartmut Esslinger founded the company as the German industrial design firm Esslinger Design, where he established the aesthetic of Sony and Apple. When Mark Rolston took over Frog as chief creative officer in 2005, he focused on digital experiences, in a world that was less about hardware and more about software. When Neubert took over in 2014, he brought an ad man perspective to the design firm, to juggle increasingly complicated service design experiences, like Disney MagicBands. He also launched an incubator for big-bet startups, an experimental research lab, and a platform for social innovation.

So Frog is spreading decision-making across five people rather than giving it to one. It’s unclear how this will play out in day-to-day logistics. Will disagreements be settled by vote, or will the final decisions formerly reserved for the CCO just end up on the desk of West (who is himself a designer)? But the new structure may hint at larger ambitions—to distribute Frog’s business to different talent in far-flung corners of the world, without having to filter everything through a central design officer. Presumably, it could allow Frog to scale.

Which is harder in today's climate than you’d think. While design is more in demand than ever, the business of design consultancies has been in flux. Mega business consultants Accenture and IBM have each been making $100 million-plus bets on increasing their design fluency. Meanwhile, design firms ranging from Lunar to Ideo have reassessed their business strategies, and firms like Yves Behar’s Fuseproject have sold outright to foreign investors.

Frog too has had its share of turmoil. When Neubert took over as CCO in 2014, he did so following a mass exodus of mid-level to senior-level employees, including former president Doreen Lorenzo, CCO Mark Rolston, principal design technologist Jared Ficklin, executive creative director Jan Chipchase, and chief development officer Mark Gauger. “Companies of this scale and this type, there’s obviously an interval of some commotion [when someone leaves],” Neubert told me at the time. “You look at any big ad agency, one of the most important people decides to leave, usually the other people are leaving, too.”

To some extent, Frog’s business has been in transition since 2006, when it was purchased by the software company Flextronics, which later became Aricent, which is itself owned by the investment firm Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co (KKR). While Frog makes an estimated nine-figure global revenues, its affiliation with KKR demands lofty, quarterly revenues from Frog. These financial demands put considerable pressure on top creatives, who are tasked with selling clients as much as they are designing for them.
Meanwhile, Frog, like all design firms, has to adapt to thrive in the modern era. In overly simplistic terms, Esslinger’s Frog would have sold like Lunar or Fuseproject. The UX-driven Frog first defined by Rolston would be swallowed like Adaptive Path, which joined Capital One in 2014. Of course, neither of those things happened, as Frog evolved under each leader. But West’s five-person, cross-discipline creative board seems to be betting that a diversity of skills and geography is the best way to position Frog to own those widely encompassing, signature experiences that Neubert was after.

Market uncertainty isn’t an entirely new problem for Frog. “We faced growing as a strategic firm and getting better and better at that, while balancing what we brought to the world, which was being really great at design,” Rolston says of his tenure as CCO. “There are things Accenture and IBM do well,” he adds, “but they still don’t actually make products.”

With or without Neubert, Frog will continue to be one of the world’s only design consultancies that’s capable of building real things. However, Frog has never been a company without a CCO—a singular perspective to ground its strategy in the future. And it’s with some level of irony that, as many corporations around the globe are hiring the position for the first time, Frog has abandoned it.

Mark Wilson
STUDENT INTERVIEW

Class & Company
BA1

10 words or less about yourself
I love getting lost in woods and rolling in snow.

Something most people don't know about you
I'm really good at moonwalking!

An interesting fact from your country
Swedes love singing songs while drinking snaps.

The New Black on TV/Movies
I would like to recommend, Gympaläraren at svtplay.se
Everybody should start moving their asses more! :)

The New Black in DESIGN
Kwangho Lee makes very interesting furniture.
http://www.kwangholee.com/

The New Black in Slang
Varför? Is “why” in Swedish

Nominated for the next issue
Denis Vilenica, BA1

Do you have any interesting websites, movies, or good reads that you’d like to share with the rest of the school? Send them to: wozzop@gmail.com
Arizona twins is a French and energetic duo formed in 2015. After traveling the world for 10 years with their previous band, Katty and Ana are going back to rock'n'roll music with powerful, simple and efficient songs!

**Musical Performance with Lisa Busby**
Saturday 9 April
16:30
Bildmuseet
The musician, artist and DJ Lisa Busby presents a solo gig at Bildmuseet with songs from her latest album Fingers in the Gloss, where the beautiful non-linear music is created through improvisation on playback media such as turntable and tape. Busby plays with textural, minimal noise and striking pop vocals. Busby’s vocal performance is beyond measured, a soft, sometimes stretching accompaniment to the repetitive layers of her noise. Melody meets noise and song fragments coalesce into larger entities. Free Admission.

**Ami Hallberg Pauli - stand up comedy!**
Friday 8 April
12:10-12:50
Ljusgården atrium, Teacher Education Building
Maybe you’ve seen her on TV in the stand up-show RAW or in her own show Ladies Fight with funny women only.
Amy’s stand up is a lot about not being 25 anymore but also about inequality and other injustice in society. This show will be in Swedish.