

Cultures, classifications, counsel and the value of design research

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Cultures, Classifications, Counsel and the Value of Design Research

Issues of The Design Journal are either general or 'open' issues containing a variety of articles, or alternatively special issues. Special issues cover either the outputs of the EAD biennial conference, contemporary design issues defined by geographical regions or specific pertinent topics of interest to our readership proposed by guest editors. In special issues, therefore, we would expect to find strong connections between the constituent papers. In open issues, there is no such expectation, especially taking into account the wide diversity of topics within the remit of a journal such as this one.

This is an open issue, and so covers a range of different subjects. And yet, as ever, there are some connections to be made. A number of the papers address issues of design management in some way. Wodehouse and Maclachlan report on a study with student design teams comparing the effect of different cultural backgrounds and individual characteristics in determining the roles played by team members either as 'creators' or 'influencers'. A richer understanding of such cultural diversity and its impact on interpersonal relationships could be of huge value to design management in building more effective design teams, especially in such internationally interconnected times as these.

Green, Southee and Boulton's paper develops a conceptual ontology of design process, with the caveat that a particular problem is 'the gap between academic development of conceptual models and the reality of commercial practice'. The authors acknowledge that the ontology is useful in a pedagogic context, but that an interesting challenge is to explore its potential for commercial design management. Cultural diversity in different stakeholders is also noted here, highlighting the fact that there is 'no shared understanding' of the design process. Perhaps necessarily densely written and argued, the paper nevertheless results in a remarkably clear and convincing visualization of a 'prototype ontology' of the design process.

More definitions are provided by Tooze et al in their attempt to position the different terminology associated with the emerging phenomenon of open design. In doing so, they usefully distinguish the subtle yet important differences between many closely related terms, and in doing so, usefully clarify communications and discussions about design. The design management of open design is yet to be discussed in depth, and such definitions can only help those debates that will no doubt take place in the near future.

Nielsen and Christensen compare and contrast two possible styles of design management: traditional 'administrative' management and 'entrepreneurial' management. The authors position administrative management as 'goal oriented', dealing largely with 'what is' and entrepreneurial management as more 'opportunity oriented', exploring 'what might be' and consequently much closer to the creative activities of designers. Design and entrepreneurship are seen as potentially mutually beneficial, and the authors propose better paths of communication between the two, recognizing that 'through increased sharing of knowledge the field of design could add important new insights to the field of

entrepreneurship in terms of opportunity creation, and the field of entrepreneurship could enrich the field of design in matters of opportunity implementation and venturing’.

Very much focused towards design practice rather than design management, Mugge et al describe a study of the visual design cues that packaging designers use to connote ‘premier status’ in the marketplace. Using rapid ethnography methodologies, the authors describe the development of guidelines for designers and test them with a case study of design proposals and users responses to them. Users are also the focus of Giacomini’s paper, which attempts to provide ‘a relatively complete definition of the paradigm of human centred design’. The paper also usefully discusses the potential economic benefits of such an approach as a business strategy.

Classifications and cultural differences arise again in Niedderer and Townsend’s paper, showing that craft, art and design are often perceived as different cultures, although they argue that craft is much more difficult to define in the first place. The authors argue for the enterprise of craft research and that rigorous research in the crafts is required to position craft ‘both as a practice and as a discipline that is viable and relevant for the future’.

All of the papers, in one way or another, discuss the value of design research. ‘The Value of Design Research’, as many of you will by now be aware, is the theme of the 11th EAD conference, to be held in Paris in April 2015. The discussions in this issue then are timely, and no doubt will be further developed during the conference itself. Hopefully I will see many of you there.