

Approaches to Design in the Management of Design Centers

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مقترحات في التصميم لإدارة مراكز التصميم
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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to study the different approaches to design in internationally well-known design centers and their associated design support organizations. Management aspects of such centers are also considered. The emphasis is placed on the important lessons derived from a study visit carried out by the researcher to several German design centers. Interviewing the directors of German Design Centers was planned in advance and twelve questions were sent by e-mail to prepare them for the meetings. These meetings were facilitated by a number of German scholars, professional designers, and design journalists who also contributed to the meetings and the outcomes. The paper offers a number of recommendations for improving the performance of the JDC's approach to management and design.

ملخص

الهدف الرئيس لهذا البحث هو دراسة الطرق المختلفة التي يمكن اتباعها من قبل إدارات مراكز التصميم المعروفة عالميا والمنظمات التابعة لها للتعامل مع التصميم. كما يتناول البحث أيضا الأوجه الإدارية لتلك المراكز العالمية، حيث تم التأكيد على الدروس الهامة التي استنتجت من الدراسة الميدانية التي قام بها الباحث لعدد من مراكز التصميم الألمانية. فقد تمت مقابلة مدراء مراكز التصميم الألمانية بعد أن خطط لها مسبقا بإرسال اثني عشر سؤالا بالبريد الإلكتروني لمدراء تلك المراكز للتحضير للمقابلة. وقد قام عدد من الباحثين، والمصممين المحترفين، وصحفيي التصميم الألمان بتسهيل تلك اللقاءات والمساهمة في مناقشة مخرجاتها. وقد خلص البحث بعدد من التوصيات لتحسين الأداء الإداري والتصميمي لمركز التصميم الأردني.

Introduction

Making design a field of professional practice is not at all an easy task. To benefit sufficiently from design requires strong belief in its values and impact as well as its positive effects on the development of a total human experience. A firm conviction in the power of design ultimately leads to strengthening the position of both the government and the private sector in the improvement of people's lives. Based on this belief, industrial countries have started to garner their efforts in enhancing the role of design to tangibly improve and develop all facets of life for their citizens.

The well-established design organizations (councils, centers, societies, museums and schools) in industrialized countries have been consciously maintaining a proper design infrastructure in their approach to industrial developments. Germany, for example, was among the first countries to apply quality assurance in all German Design organizations from as far back as the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The establishment of the Deutscher Wekbund in Munich in 1907 contributed enormously to the improvement of the quality of Germany's industrial, commercial, and household products. The Wekbund is the first influential organization of artists, craftsmen, architects, and industrialists which sought to inspire good design and craftsmanship for mass-produced goods and architecture, (Hiesinger, K. B. and Marcus, G. H., 1993, and Encyclopedia Britannica). In Germany "the world's fastest – growing industrial nation" in the early 20th century, for instance, design reform "became inextricably linked after the turn of the century with machine production" (Hiesinger, K. B. and Marcus, G. H., 1993, p 16).

To deal with the deficiencies in the field of design in Jordan, Professor Hans Dehlinger (May, 2007) recommends:

1. "implementing a task, which requires a long standing commitment and numerous concerted as well as isolated actions of all players".
2. Disseminating knowledge about design and striving to popularise it even though this has proved to be a permanent challenge in society
3. Coordinating activities of involved organisations
4. Independently engaging creative individuals within the design scene, and organizations concerned with design supporting such individual efforts as far as possible, both conceptually and financially (p. 3).

Doing so, it is important to establish a taskforce, with a long-standing commitment to improving the Jordanian design scenario through a concerted effort by all players, whether collectively or individually.

Background

The establishment of the Jordanian Design Centre, JDC, in June 2006, after seven years of hard work and heavy investment by the university, was a serious step towards strong infrastructure initiatives in Jordan. The JDC is one of only four Jordanian organizations, the other three being the King Abdullah II Design and Development Bureau (KADDB), Design Jordan, and Mahfouz Kassisieh Development MKD that view design as an essential component for comprehensive, long-term, cultural and economic improvements. As stated in the project proposal, "the JDC is the only professional organization that addresses the multifaceted and continually changing nature of design in Jordan and the region. It is, also, the primary source of information, research and education about design and its role in both our culture and economy. It represents all design education disciplines (industrial design, textile and fashion design, graphic design, interior design, and other related design and fine art areas), and demonstrates that design theory and innovation are inseparable from design education and practice. JDC is committed to connecting its members: Professors, Students, Designers, Industrialists, Businessmen, Analysts, Marketing Researchers and all other concerned parties to each other and to the research, ideas, and technologies that are continually shaping,

reshaping, and influencing design education and practice nationally and internationally.” (JDC, July 22, 2004).

The project’s writer states that “Carrying out YU’s (Yarmouk University’s) strong conviction in the value of design, the JDC is convinced that design, in combination with imagination, innovative thinking and effective communication, is a crucial industrial, social, and economic factor for any successful business. The JDC’s ultimate goal is to graduate and prepare highly qualified designers who can synthesize technology and aesthetics to best serve human needs and to reflect human values of society.” Through its different activities, the JDC is dedicated to:

- Facilitating individual creativity, conceptual thinking, risk-taking and networking
- Improving interdisciplinary flexibility, co-operation, and personal motivation ("non - fad - driven aesthetic appropriateness placing a particular interest in the imaginative front end of design to answer the question "what should be created?")
- Encouraging students, trainees, practicing designers, and managers to use design processes appropriate to the task at hand, and developing advanced tools and methods that promote superior design and manufacturing of products.

According to the project’s writer, the “JDC’s support of excellence in professional product and other designs will help very much in improving the quality of life». This is a very important impact of the JDC for it ‘strengthens the well-being of citizens by creating aesthetically high quality environments and friendly, safe products’. Such an approach would lead to a strong Jordanian identity in design products. A forceful impact of design in all aspects of life would make it necessary to optimize the usability of design to include all “people-oriented design thinking”. “Integrating design in the core orientations of all businesses”, would assuredly lead to increasing the number of governmental and non-governmental organizations using quality design services, and making design a component of strategic planning. When design becomes a more integrated aspect of technological and commercial training, many important changes will take place.

Running and sustaining this high profile design organization with its broad cross sectional activities and interests requires experienced management that can incorporate the different disciplines of design in both education and business. With this in mind, a study tour to the reputable design centers in Germany was conducted to support and enhance the JDC’s management experience. The tour involved an extensive training course supervised by the University of Kassel with the cooperation of different design centers and applied arts museums in Germany. The University of Kassel was chosen for its central geographical location and its important role in promoting and supporting design practice. The training programme included a good number of design centers and design and applied arts museums in cities such as Frankfurt, Hannover, Essen, Stuttgart, Berlin, Freiburg, Hessen, and Kassel.

Nature of the study visit

Professor Dr. Hans Dehlinger (Professor of Product Design) and Professor Dr. Karin Stempel (Dean of the Design Faculty) at the University of Kassel had made detailed arrangements for the study tour. They also arranged the various visits within Germany, set up meetings with a number of prominent German professors and practising designers, proposed study questions, and facilitated the discussion of meeting outcomes with Professor Dehlinger.

The participant had meetings and worked closely with the directors of the different German design centers and a design museum. Seventeen (17) meetings were held with museum curators, design center directors and managers, professional designers, and university professors of design, in the period between September 4th and 25th, 2006. The meetings focused on the management approaches to different design problems, policies, philosophies, and missions. The nature of each center's professional practice was explored. Comparisons and contrasts were considered in order to gain deeper insight into the management approaches to various design issues. The participant was accompanied by several German professors, designers, and other facilitators in addition to Professor Dehlinger, who was present during most meeting sessions.

The study tour focused on finding meaningful answers to a number of questions, and the ways and means adopted by the management of German design organizations to activate the role of design in overall development. The following questions were put raised:

1. What can you do to make design a field of professional practice?
2. What is your basic role towards making the government and private sectors believe in the creative and innovative powers of design?
3. How do you define the role of designers in industrial and cultural development?
4. How do you succeed in dealing with design as a management discipline?
5. How can you develop a workable set of design criteria?
6. How do you successfully invest in design?
7. How do you work out a proper framework or policy to improve the image of Germany through design?
8. How can you contribute to the values of the adequate national brands and products of strong identity?
9. Can you participate forcefully in industry's decision-making process to improve designers' attitudes, skills, and methodologies?
10. How do you establish effective connections with:
 - The Industry.
 - Design Organizations.

- Design Centers
- Design Education Organization
- Young generations

11. How do you develop local and global strategies?
12. How can you sustain your business and keep your center running effectively?

If the questions were answered properly and professionally, the visit would achieve its goals and provide an adequate database of knowledge for the productive and efficient management of Yarmouk University's JDC.

Transferring best practice with regard to strategies, technologies, design, and management skills would ultimately lead to upgrading and strengthening the administrative capacity of the JDC's management through:

1. Gaining practical knowledge and experience in generating design jobs and projects that best serve industry and the design profession.
2. Establishing professional connections and broader networks with internationally recognized design centers, councils and institutions.
3. Gaining closer insight into effective management approaches.
4. Exchanging experiences and expertise with others in the field on best practices in the field of design.
5. Understanding the key role played by design institutions and their recent advances in managing the design process and practice

Lessons to be learned

International Forum Design iF: The meeting with the Director of iF in Hannover extended 3 hours. The director first talked about the history of iF during the last 50 years focusing on the major contributions and developments iF had offered to the German industry, the design profession, and young designers.

The source of iF's power, he confirmed, is the strong financial support it receives from both business and industry. The main reason behind the success of Germany's Design Centers, in general, is the private sector's financial strength and leadership. He believes that it is business leadership, and not design, that has a greater influence on businesses, decision makers, and politics concerning the value of design and its strategic power in business development. When designers talk to the industry they use language that the industry does not or does not want to understand. Thus, it seems that designers have less advantage over successful businessmen with strong convictions about design, who are able to speak more convincingly and logically to industry about the value and strategic influence of design. **Harold Boehl GmbH (CNC – Dreh und Frästechnik)** in Rosenthal, for example is a firm owned by a young German engineer. He has a very strong opinion and trust in the value of design and the effect of its role in product innovation. In fact he has been a forceful spokesperson regarding the importance and relevance of design in

the business sector. Several of his company's products were designed by students of University of Kassel. He also favors the idea of museums playing a more proactive role in the field of design.

Other design centers, which receive financial support from the government or the public, are not only knowledgeable about how to obtain the funding they need, but also how to spend it well. They have the expertise, the experience, and the aspiration to do so. However, these qualities alone without the funding to support them would be completely ineffective. Some design centers in Germany are in a state of decline precisely because of this lack of financial support by the government.

This is not the case with iF. iF has had several impressive successes in the business world following which it has devised the proper means by which businessmen themselves persuade the world of business (SMEs) about their successes through the skillful use of design. Designers, on the other hand, according to iF's experience, are best suited to work professionally and effectively, mainly in matters of creativity.

The Koreans, with their huge investments in design centers, for instance, have consulted iF for developing and activating the role of design centers in the Korean industry, without imposing any financial restrictions. The Brazilians, on the other hand, are short of finances due to lack of public or private sector support. However, they have enjoyed considerable success in the improvement of design by focusing on branding, the Brazilian personality, and providing Design solution in other countries.

Bayern Design and Neuesmuseum Staatliches (Museum Fur Kunst und Design) in Nürnberg: Both organizations follow an approach that involves a short run policy supported by the various museum activities consisting of:

1. Promoting new and young designers by holding a biennial design award announced to all graduated students in the Bayern region. A national jury decides three winners and the design projects are exhibited in the final show. The winning project, along with other selected works, is published in a very well designed catalogue that is distributed nationally and internationally. The idea is to open up doors toward the industry under the center's logo while maintaining its corporate identity and high standards.
2. Offering short lectures and workshops (one evening events) about the value of design and the important role it plays in business development. The main idea is to heighten awareness of the design issue by publicizing successful examples from the business world. SMEs are kept informed and updated through business to business dialogues that have an educational aspect. Discussions or briefings for this purpose are held in the factory or the company premises.
3. Maintaining a data base that consists of comprehensive information about experts and professionals in the different areas of design and business development.

The approach adopted by the Bayern Design Center shows successful cooperation

between design experts working with industry and museum experts (as in the case of **Neuesmuseum Staatliches Museum Fur Kunst und Design**) in the areas of documentation, history, and publicity. This is also the case with the **Kassel Museum of Art, Handcraft and Design, Vitra Museum, Bauhaus – Archiv Museum For Gestaltung** in Berlin, and **Thonet Furniture Museum**. These museums have high standards and apply stringent criteria for works that can be considered for collections. The JDC can greatly benefit from this experience in setting the proper criteria for its design work collections and the most effective ways and means to promote and support design.

The **Thonet Furniture Museum** is a commendable example of industry successfully designing its own products and even establishing its own museum. The museum offers a retrospective of furniture development through successful designs and periods of time.

It is worth noting here that the **Mercedes Benz museum** in Stuttgart with its fabulous architecture and location is very influential in promoting design and the design process with particular emphasis on quality and innovation. It effectively presents models 'from the invention of the automobile to the latest inventions of the future'. In the past, its vision transformed the automobile industry on a worldwide scale; and its influence continues to this very day. The museum is an outstanding example for other similar institutions to follow, for it superbly combines the past, present and future, in an appealing and tasteful manner.

Design Zentrum Nordrhein Westfalen DZNW and the Red Dot Museum in Essen:

This design organization is supported by the German Ministry of Economics which, according to the director, means good business and active involvement in different design activities. The Essen Design Center DZNW is associated with the Red Dot Museum and also with its very famous and prestigious design award. It is through this association that the center became involved in the following key areas:

1. Governmental and political decision-making.
2. Creativity and innovation through design.
3. Business and industry.

The center proposes ideas, projects, and activities for improvement and development. It tackles vital questions such as what the various players need, what they lack, and what their weakness and strengths are. Deficiencies in industry and business, the creativity of designers, political decision making and other relevant topics are discussed and considered crucial issues at the center. Furthermore, exhibitions, workshops, and conferences are regularly held and viewed as an approach to solving problems.

The center's director believes that such events that focus on good design concepts and quality design products are important vehicles through which the efficient integration of design, politics, and business can be displayed. Different approaches are adopted for different events. For example, if products from only one company are exhibited, the role

of design in improving the company's products and business is emphasized. Diverse areas and subjects are considered for exhibitions such as tourism, handicrafts and other products.

The kind of audiences, their feedback, and reactions are considered important in order to assess and understand what exactly is needed from the various organizations connected with the design center. If, for example, political figures patronize the center's activities, their influence and stature could help in raising public awareness of the role of design in development. If entities such as the Goethe Institute, the German embassies, and the German Parliament Commission with the approval of Red Dot would sponsor the center's design related activities, success in reaching the center's goals would be much more achievable. However, it must be realized that the best of all scenarios is not always possible. It is therefore most important to maintain a high standard in order to enjoy a qualitative edge over competitors.

Design Center Stuttgart is a completely state-run organization, which adopts the best case studies from industry and design institutions. It places great value on the **International Design Award**, which was established in 1960 and recently adapted to promote topics that change annually. The center, supported by German governmental organizations, also conducts **traveling exhibitions** that showcase the improvement of German industry through design.

Another successful activity it organizes is the design conference, 'Face to Face', which aims at establishing effective communication between clients and designers through direct dialogue. The conference includes an exhibition of designed products that represent the success of design and business in Germany and other countries. It is an arena for concerned people from design, industry, and business to meet individually, exchange ideas, and discuss their problems. 'Face-to-Face' has become an independent association in order to become more flexible, and free from the routine of state bureaucracy. The event takes place on company premises or other venues where speeches, meetings and lectures can be delivered.

Recently, the center has placed special emphasis and value on the role played by design museums in promoting and supporting design in the belief that museums and design centers complement each other. They are not only interconnected but also interrelated.

One of the major projects the Stuttgart Design Center has undertaken is to establish a '**Design Fame**' museum. Although the **Stuttgart Staatliche Museum and the Mercedes Benz Museum** with their spectacular architecture, impeccably planned settings, and their collections, are accessible to the design center, the need for a 'Design Fame' museum has evidently been felt by the center in pursuit of its vision for future development. By exhibiting the history of artifacts, museums can envision the shape of things to come. Museums have been effectively presented the inventions, which have been changing the world and continue to do this every day.

Speck Design in Stuttgart is a design office owned and managed by four designers, graduated from Stuttgart University. The scope of their work covers interiors, events, products, architecture, and graphic design. Speck's approach is an excellent case study of how designers acquire knowledge about:

1. Ways to generate business
2. Dealing successfully with projects in terms of client/designer communication, pricing, and project progress.
3. Writing project scenarios, reports and contracts.

Rat Fur Formgebung and the **German Design Council (GDC)** in Frankfurt (Main): GDC policies share similarities with iF's approach. The basic strategy is to highlight good success stories to convince companies of the values of design. The GDC is experienced in holding exhibitions connected with trade shows representing firms that manufacture well-designed products. It also has the best specialized design library in Germany with an online catalogue.

Conclusion

As stated by Professor Dehlinger who organized and monitor the visit of the JDC's director to the German design centres and other design institutions, the main points behind the visit were "to discuss relevant matters with local authorities and directors of centres, to gain insights into their operational context, to provide first hand information, and to facilitate information transfer on the importance and the roles of industrial design to economic and industrial development of a country."

(Dehlinger, May 2007, pp 4-5). According to him, this information should provide "an educated view on the potentials as well as the problems associated with this sort of design infrastructure. The hope is, that conclusions and arguments can be drawn from it to help in the search for a particular and necessarily specific "Jordanian Way" for the set-up of such institutions" (p 5).

Investigating the various approaches of design centers and related organizations in Germany provided a deeper insight and broader knowledge on the ways and means by which to support and promote design in Jordan. German design centers have been proven to be the benchmark of design infrastructure since the end of the 19th century. They were established to help industry, design and produce high quality products and services. This was achieved by placing great value on creativity and innovation, and by offering young designers the opportunities to express their talent and artistry in an immensely challenging field.

In their own different ways, German design centers have succeeded in sustaining their business operations by following feasible and effective strategies to promote and support design. They all believe that design is a viable tool that plays an important role in the overall development of the economic, social, and cultural spheres of life. Their strategy has been to make business people (not designers or design people) talk to industry about

the value of design, and the difference it can make. This special approach has resulted in successful business stories. They have also concentrated considerable investment and effort in publicity through advertisements, publications, competitions, lectures, short workshops, well-advertised shows and awards. Strong publicity campaigns by design centers along with prestigious design museums that display a futuristic vision of the values and powers of design assuredly have their impact on the overall development of the design industry.

Design centers become well known to businesses, politics, and the design world through their innovative approaches to design, their efficient and basic design services, and their continuous support of quality assurance in design, technology and business. Strong financial support and the professional approach adopted by the private sector have been the main forces behind the success of German design centers. The government's financial and political support of German state-owned design centers and councils could also be one of the reasons for their success, in combination with other condition characterizing the management of design centers. It should be noted, that lack of financial support by the government to such design centers has been the main reason behind their failure.

Whether financially supported by business or government, design centers should be able to generate their own funds in order to sustain their activities and programmes. Generating money simply for the sake of profit cannot be the ultimate goal of such centers. It must be realized that design centers are not established to compete with design businesses but rather to support, promote, and create a more professionally convenient atmosphere for designers and their craft. Thus their focus is on coordinating business with design, and making design an essential component of business competitiveness. The management of the Jordanian Design Center can strongly benefit from such experiences.

Preparing the center for growth and development, and regular improvements at all levels including design applications is imperative. The center should provide assistance and services in areas such as market projection, building a clear image of products, diversification, searching for new markets, and benefiting from the synergy of business, design, art, science and new technology.

The mission of the JDC is to provide a vital link between YU activities and manufacturing and business through design and research. The JDC supports the university's mission through service initiatives and business partnerships of mutual interest, addressing opportunities and challenges, locally and internationally. Thus, the JDC's goals and efforts reach out beyond the traditional boundaries of design know-how to include participation in the economic and cultural development of Jordan and indeed the region, which is one of the main aims of the university.

Through collaboration with the Jordanian Innovation Center (JIC), King Abdullah II Design and Development Bureau (KAADB), Design Jordan (DJ), Grapheast, and various

other businesses, the JDC can assist companies and inventors through all phases, i.e., right from the conceptualization and development of a product to bringing it to market. Its professional services, prototyping, manufacturing facilities and entrepreneurial ideas could greatly enhance the success of businesses and products in a highly competitive marketplace.

Being part of YU with its new quality assurance system and innovative new projects and programs, the JDC helps in the growth of design and manufacturing businesses. The power of design lies in its ability to make strong connections and to integrate beauty, technology, and functionality (workable solutions) in areas where design was never thought of as a strategic approach. (Gianfranco Zaccai, June-August, 2003, *ICSIDnews* 3-4/2003, p.10).

What is most promising is the fact that Jordan has recently established three important organizations that deal with design promotion from different perspectives. If they, according to Dehlinger, “receive sufficient support, they may be able to pursue similar roles in the picture of the Jordanian infrastructure of design as the many design centres and institutions existing in Germany”, (Dehlinger, May 2007, p 4). Consequently, finding ways and means to sustain, encourage, and support the efforts of such valuable design organizations, is a most crucial factor.

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