

Emotional and Social Intelligence as 'Magic Key' in Innovation: A Designer's call toward inclusivity for all

Jörn Bühning

joern.buehring@polyu.edu.hk | The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, School of Design, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Patricia A Moore

designmoore@cox.net | MooreDesign Associates, Phoenix, Arizona, USA

Letter From Academia

Abstract. This paper draws attention to the emotional and social intelligence of individuals - encompassing self- and social awareness, empathy and social skills; when applied to innovation, it can boost employee creativity, diversity, risk taking, learning, adapting, and strategic decision making which is deemed as critical in meeting the challenges of the 21st Century. Meanwhile, Design in Business and Innovation have become increasingly synonymous in both meaning (e.g. design and futures thinking) and reach (e.g. products, services, business models, and systems), placing renewed focus on creative human capital as the organizations' greatest asset. Expanding the conversation of Design in business as a strategic role to develop user-centered innovations through 'inclusivity for all', it is proposed that an organization's emotional and social intelligence may well bear the 'magic key' toward competitive resilience and long-term survival.

Keywords. Design; Universal Design; Innovation; Foresight; Inclusivity; Emotional Intelligence.

Cite paper as: Bühning, J., Moore, P., (2018). Emotional and Social Intelligence as 'Magic Key' in Innovation: A Designer's call toward inclusivity for all - Letter From Academia, *Journal of Innovation Management*, www.open-jim.org, 6(2), 6-12. <http://hdl.handle.net/10216/113222>

1 Introduction

Rapid globalization, increasing competitiveness through technological advances and social impacts are among the driving forces that require new strategic directions and decision-making in modern business. That is, to meet the demands of fast-moving market places, competitive resilience and long-term survival can only be achieved through organizational foresight and creative leadership (Handy, 2011), and the emotional and social intelligence of the organization and its employees, is considered ever more paramount in meeting the challenges of the 21st Century (Bar-On, Tranel, Denburg, & Bechara, 2004; Goleman, 2017; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013).

Meanwhile, the role of Design in business and innovation has gradually expanded over the last two decades. From simply creating and communicating better products, Design is now seen as a set of competencies spanning across innovation, product and portfolio development, market and strategic decision-making, thus enabling interdisciplinary stakeholder teams responsible for creating sustainable value propositions that ensure the organization's future (Bohemia, Rieple, Liedtka, & Cooper, 2014; Buehring & Liedtka, 2018; Heskett, 2001; Lojacono & Zaccai, 2004). Indeed, progressive organizations have noted the favorable use of Design principles applied to problem-solving, sparking the popularity of human-centered design (thinking) processes and applications toward transformative innovations in a global economy (Dunne & Martin, 2006; Liedtka, 2017; Oster, 2008).

Design principles and tools applied in the strategic development of an organization's future-orientation, has positioned Strategic Design in innovation as an organizational competence that looks beyond one-time creative outputs (e.g. products or services), toward Design as an organizational activity that can lead to sustained innovation and competitiveness (Boztepe, 2016; Bühning & Koskinen, 2017; Heskett, 2001; Mozota, 1998). Consequently, Design and Innovation have become increasingly synonymous in both meaning (e.g. design and futures thinking) and reach (e.g. products, services, business models, and systems), placing renewed focus on creative human capital as the organizations' greatest asset (Florida, 2004). In this 'letter from industry', the authors aim, foremost, to expand the conversation of Design in business as a strategic role to develop user-centered innovations based on 'inclusivity for all', in which an organization's emotional and social intelligence may well bear the 'magic key' toward competitive resilience and long-term survival.

2 Emotional and Social Intelligence

It has been suggested that emotional and social intelligence accounts for more than 85% of exceptional achievement within individuals; it encompasses self- and social awareness, empathy and social skills (Goleman, 1995). In aggregate of teams with high emotional and social intelligence, the organization that encourages such qualities to be applied to innovation, are boosting employee creativity, diversity, risk taking, learning, adapting, and strategic decision making (Barczok, Lassk, & Mulki, 2010), which is highly relevant to the development of an organizations' strategic direction and future innovation portfolio. When visionary physicist Stephen Hawking was asked which human failing he would like to correct he answered, "aggression", and which

traits he would like to see more often, he responded, "kindness and understanding". Which human quality would he like most to magnify? "Empathy."

3 Design inclusivity - for all [A Designer's perspective]

By definition, design inclusivity (or inclusive design) is to extend the innovation focus beyond a narrowly defined target user, and to address the needs of a wider group of users by designing products, services, and experiences that are accessible to as many people as possible (Clarkson, Coleman, Keates, & Lebbon, 2013). Design for all, is "... the intervention into environments, products and services which aims to ensure that anyone, including future generations, regardless of age, gender, capacities or cultural background, can participate in social, economic, cultural and leisure activities with equal opportunities" (Designforall.org, 2018). An example of inclusive design is Sam Farber's OXO Good Grips invention, which initially started with a kitchen utensil (the peeler) as a design challenge to include people with reduced dexterity as well as creating kitchen tools that were more comfortable for everyone. In present day, among a growing list of brands embracing inclusive design in innovation, the OXO brand has developed over 500 products based on its Inclusive Design philosophy, leading to numerous design awards and a profitable business practice.

Indeed, concern for the wider society has been a central theme in Design for generations, and over time, determining the expanding role of the Designer. From the moment that our Cro-Magnon ancestors chipped stones to create cutting tools, we have designed. Creating for our comfort, providing for our existence, responding to the daily challenges that impact our lives is a matter of design. The places and things that make up our individual realms are the results of someone's daring, thinking, and action. Throughout history, Designers have been those people who challenge the norm, rise to the occasion, and seize the opportunity to make a difference for all lives.

Just as the curiosity of DaVinci made way for the first flight of the Wright Brothers, the combustion engine led to the success of rockets capable of launching into space. The invention of the moment gives birth to the products of the future, just as the grandfathers of industrial design in America, Loewy, Teague, Dreyfuss, gave shape to endless products that fill our lives today. Automobiles, airplanes, telephones; all of the things which we, as consumers, have come to expect and require are made possible by the creativity of the art and science that is Design, under the direction of dedicated Designers.

3.1 The dawn of a new era in Design - "Universal"

In the 1960's, product designers found themselves faced by ever-growing challenges. In an exceptional and daring experiment over a period of three years (1979-82), Patricia Moore [author 2] travelled throughout the United States and Canada disguised as women more than eighty years of age. With her body altered to simulate the normal sensory changes associated with aging, she was able to respond to people, products, and environments as an elder [Figure 1].



Fig. 1. Experiencing the Future: Patricia Moore dressed as a woman in her 80s

This experience helped illuminate the missed opportunities in broadening the design and innovation focus, consequently helping to define what is commonly known as Universal Design.

The concerns of poverty, the preservation of the environment, and physical accessibility brought Designers into a new role, as arbiters of the quality of life. Determination of the shape and scope of our cities, protection and support of fragile resources that are our planet, and the independence and autonomy of all persons, throughout the course of their life's entirety catapulted the importance of good Design and the position of the Designer into a role of vital importance.

Just as DaVinci questioned the accepted, the Designer working with interdisciplinary innovation teams of today must re-define what is known. Today's answers must support tomorrow's questions. There has never been a more exciting or vital time for the presence of Design in business foresight and innovation. And, the need for "humanism" in Design has never been more crucial to our future.

3.2 Inclusivity by Design

By focusing our talents on the needs of each individual as equal, Designers have given birth to a new order: "Inclusivity by Design". This 'design for all' philosophic challenge doesn't simply ask "Why?" but rather, "Why not?". Designers don't speak of limitations, instead they tend to focus on possibilities. The emergence of 'inclusivity' in design supports the conviction that where there is a 'deficit', we will present a solution. "Where there is ignorance, we will strive for enlightenment. Where there is a roadblock, we will create a pathway", according to Moore, who is widely recognized as a leading authority on consumer lifespan behaviors.

With the dawn of the new millennium, the Designer has emerged as the navigator, the translator for what consumers want and wish, their hopes and their desires. Beyond providing for a successful bottom-line for the corporate realm, Design in business and innovation will perpetuate the presence of the companies which address consumer needs. Beyond the confines of the aesthetic, Designers and interdisciplinary innovation team ought to have the capacity to fashion the very quality of life itself. That is, expanding the conversation of Design in business, foresight and innovation, toward 'inclusivity for all', organizations stand to develop and foster their employee's emotional and social intelligence, which may well bear the 'magic key' in their forward-looking and strategic innovations.

4 Conclusion

The human factor has returned to center stage, and the need and opportunity for inclusivity in design and innovation has never been more critical. That is, while rapid globalization, increasing competitiveness through technological advances and social impacts are among the driving forces that require new strategic directions and decision-making, it is the emotional and social intelligence of the Organization and its employees, now considered paramount in meeting the challenges of the 21st Century. Organizations, therefore, should embrace the necessary foundation for meeting consumer wishes, needs, and dreams, by focusing strategic innovation efforts on providing features and aspects which meet the range of everyone's needs. Hence, expanding the conversation of Design in business to include the needs of specific people with other abilities, or younger, weller consumers, interdisciplinary innovation teams will discover new opportunities for innovation by successfully applying their combined emotional and social intelligence. In doing so, they will realize their potential as designers, architects, innovators, and human engineers by practicing 'inclusivity for all'.

5 References

- Bar-On, R., Tranel, D., Denburg, N. L., & Bechara, A. (2004). Emotional and social intelligence. *Social neuroscience: key readings*, 223.
- Barczak, G., Lassk, F., & Mulki, J. (2010). Antecedents of team creativity: An examination of team emotional intelligence, team trust and collaborative culture. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 19(4), 332-345.
- Bohemia, E., Rieple, A., Liedtka, J., & Cooper, R. (2014). *Proceedings of the 19th DMI: Academic Design Management Conference: Design Management in an Era of Disruption*: Design Management Institute.
- Boztepe, S. (2016). *Design expanding into strategy: evidence from design consulting firms in: P. Lloyd & E. Bohemia, eds.* Paper presented at the Proceedings of DRS2016: Desing + Research + Society - Future Focused Thinking.
- Buehring, J., & Liedtka, J. (2018). *Foresight by design: Supporting strategic innovation with systematic futures thinking*. Paper presented at the Cumulus Paris 2018, Paris, France.

- Bühning, J., & Koskinen, I. (2017, 31 October - 3 November 2017). *Beyond Forecasting: A Design-inspired Foresight Approach for Preferable Futures*. Paper presented at the International Association of Societies of Design Research, Cincinnati, USA.
- Clarkson, P. J., Coleman, R., Keates, S., & Lebbon, C. (2013). *Inclusive design: Design for the whole population*: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Designforall.org. (2018). "Design for All" is design tailored to human diversity.
- Dunne, D., & Martin, R. (2006). Design thinking and how it will change management education: An interview and discussion. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 5(4), 512-523.
- Florida, R. (2004). *The rise of the creative class and how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life* (Paperback Ed.): New York: Basic Books.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ for character, health and lifelong achievement*: New York: Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D. (2017). *Leadership That Gets Results (Harvard Business Review Classics)*: Harvard Business Press.
- Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R. E., & McKee, A. (2013). *Primal leadership: Unleashing the power of emotional intelligence*: Harvard Business Press.
- Handy, C. (2011). *Beyond Certainty: the changing worlds of organisations*: Random House.
- Heskett, J. (2001). Past, present, and future in design for industry. *Design Issues*, 17(1), 18-26.
- Liedtka, J. M. (2017, 7-9 June 2017). *Beyond Better Solutions: Design Thinking as a Social Technology*. Paper presented at the Design Management Academy, Hong Kong, China.
- Lojacono, G., & Zaccai, G. (2004). The evolution of the design-inspired enterprise. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 45(3), 75.
- Mozota, B. B. (1998). Structuring strategic design management: Michael Porter's value chain. *Design Management Review*, 9(2), 26-31.
- Oster, G. W. (2008). Practitioners corner: Derailing design thinking. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 4(1), 107-115.

Biographies



Jörn Bühning. Dr Jörn Bühning is an Assistant Research Professor at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, School of Design. He earned a BA-equivalent degree in the field of Tourism Management (HH), an M.B.A. (VU) majoring in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and a PhD in futures Consumer Engagement Innovation at Swinburne University of Technology (SWIN) in Australia. In his current position, he is developing a collaborative approach (Design Economies, Ignite Innovation) that brings academia, designers, and business stakeholders together to develop high-impact design knowledge, concepts, and solutions. His research explores Design Foresight, Vision and Fiction techniques as emerging processes within Strategic Design and Innovation Management. An honorary Adjunct Associate Professor within the College of Business at RMIT University, he collaborates with leading Universities in research and design-led innovation. He gained international work experiences in corporate leadership throughout various industry, company and project initiatives, including innovative start-ups, new business formations, and new market entries. He has worked across a wide range of global brand icons (e.g. Bang & Olufsen A/S), organizational cultures, and international markets.



Patricia A Moore. President at MooreDesign Associates USA. Patricia Moore is an internationally renowned gerontologist and designer, serving as a leading authority on consumer lifespan behaviors and requirements. An international lecturer and author, Dr. Moore was named as one of The 40 Most Socially Conscious Designers in the world, as one of The 100 Most Important Women in America and one of 50 Americans Defining the New Millennium.