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THE EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT OF DESIGN: The Art of Making Connections through 'Meaningful Communication'

Proposing a working model for collaboration and innovation within the design process

The aim is for interdisciplinary collaboration; taking a user-centred design approach, which encompass emotional and social considerations; leading to creative, reflexive practice and innovation.

The model proposes an interactive structure between a variety of academic institutions and design organisations, participating within a creative environment. All parties recognise their emotional investment and social responsibility as integral to effective communication and true reflexive practice.

This case study involves participatory and evaluative research in order to establish a cross-disciplinary language, effective social interaction and innovative outcomes.

The main objective is to identify and define possible directions for interdisciplinary work connecting user-centred design education and project management in business with regard to language and communication.

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Creative Technologies in the School of Art & Design, especially the Multimedia Course here at the University of Huddersfield, prides itself in being explorative and experimental. A less prescriptive, process driven model of practice, devoid of business constraints, in contrast to more commercial approaches taken by other design departments.

We recognise that in order to evolve and equip students with the necessary tools for contemporary design in the twenty first century, a more progressive and integrated pedagogy is essential; a collaborative forum providing an environment that nurtures discourse, a two-way conversation from a number of participants. The freedom to express and explore is paramount if the dialogue is to be maintained and expanded, leading to innovation.

This discourse leads to 'Meaningful Communication' placing emphasis on the 'User and Social Consequence' taking the design process to the next level.

I see the relation between design and the social sciences as one that will increase the ability of design to deliver efficiency. But I see the need to use that efficiency so that we can increase not only our production of consumer goods, but our time to reflect about our human condition, our time to interact with others we love, and our time to introduce more significance, enjoyment and consciousness in our daily actions."

(Frascara 2002)

The institutional attitudes found in academia and the design industry need to be addressed and re-evaluated in order to assess the true effectiveness of creativity in design and design management practice and produce a **harmonised interdisciplinary approach** to design projects.

Business is interested in profit, socialpsychologists are concerned with understanding; design produces the means to facilitate certain tasks - all are about the realisation of others. Design and technology contribute to communication, interaction and the enjoyment of life through the use of systems and objects. The entire process centres on **emotional engagement** and **cultural choices**.

The creation and promotion of ideas operate within contexts, which need critical consideration, such as social, cultural, technical and environmental concerns. Research should not be marketing led but include anthropology, sociology and psychology, teaching needs to consider knowledge in cognitive, developmental and perceptual psychology, as well as design-specific specialisms. There is also a need to collaborate with other areas of academia and industry in order to accomplish the merger of such a broad spectrum of knowledge in the pursuit of innovation (**Appendix 1**).

INNOVATION - 'The Art of Making Connections'

The knowledge landscape is growing increasingly complex and professional and process structures have to be revised and strengthened.

There is still a critical role for management but it shouldn't dominate, project leaders and intellectuals should hold equal clout. The biggest change necessary will be one of attitude and the adoption of a new philosophy. Ridderstrale and Nordstrom's '**Spaghetti Organisation**' appears to show no apparent order but every strand of spaghetti can be pulled out and traced from beginning to end. Every individual belongs to a pool of resources, tied to a project, speciality or profession. This represents a functional organisation with the emphasis on skill and expertise - developing personal skills – fitting jobs to people rather than selecting people for fixed positions.

To achieve this philosophy where “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” we have to instigate an '**Organisational Democracy**' - Organisational Project Group Design is expensive but the one size fits all approach wont work for the changing business world of today – you need networking opportunities in order to develop abilities by joint ventures, alliances and partnerships.

So long as there is a shared understanding coordination happens naturally – everyone needs to know the shared meaning - this **shared language** is critical if we are to manage without hierarchies. The final barrier is a psychological one, we cling to what we know best, we must challenge our basic assumptions and break free from such constraints in order to achieve

a mind that does not stick
(Ridderstrale + Nordstrom. 2000)

Modern collaboration endeavours between education and industry have led to an abundance of creative activities, gaining the advantage with innovative solutions and outcomes.

We need to develop a '**Cross Disciplinary Language**' – where researchers, freelancers, client, designers, technical staff, project managers, focus groups, social scientists, can all **Engage in MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION** (**Appendix 2**).

Managing such a project need not be too difficult once all the players understand their role and the environment and process are accommodating. Modern management assumes lack of leadership results in chaos, but a leader doesn't necessarily bring order to chaos, without them repetition and stagnation may occur. A leader should instil chaos to order, they must challenge people to depart from past patterns and create new ones!

The Department of Creative Technologies in the School of Art & Design here at Huddersfield is expanding and will be introducing a cluster of new courses to begin in 2006. Indicative of this new approach is New Media Innovation – a partnership with **SWAMP**, a Leeds based Design Company who will contribute to the course development with input into all years. They will instigate evaluative focus group feedback in year 1. Brainstorming, idea generation and live project work will form the basis of in year 2. Resulting in placement opportunities for year 3, continuing with research collaboration in year 4.

SWAMP also participate, along with other contributors, to the Industry Lecture Series, Workshops and Review Panels – allowing design companies to influence the way the course develops practically, by advising us on current practice and technological developments, ensuring we remain contemporary, assisting in the nurturing of the next generation of interactive visual creatives. This proposed partnership will be the initial vehicle for the collaborative and working practice models to emerge, with equal engagement in research, design development and project management. The process will be monitored, assessed and evaluated for its effectiveness in enhancing creativity and the design process.

Centre of Excellence in Digital Design

The prime aim of CoEDD is to support Art & Design practitioners in their creative use of new tools and processes, their exploration of new and emerging media; the production of new forms of cultural content; the development of new products and the delivery of new services.

The aim is to promote a diverse knowledge transfer agenda on behalf of Creative Technologies. This involves the delivery of short training courses for companies, training 245 staff and supported 83 sme's to date, as well as running the DRU creative labs introducing new and emerging technologies to over 200 individuals. We have also supported 100 post graduate students on the Smart/ 3D/ Creative Imaging and Innovation MA Courses.

The CoEDD projects and MA Programmes in Smart Design and 3D Digital Design are internationally recognised and are linked to the work of the West Yorkshire Knowledge Exchange, the supportive network already provided by CoEDD into Digital, Electronic and Technology sectors providing essential underpinning support for Digital Content Creators. This enables CoEDD to represent research groups and produce innovative digital content research products.

The Digital Research Unit (DRU)

The DRU represents curatorial and creative direction from academic and research leadership at the university. Visiting research fellows include distinguished practitioners from an international pool including the USA, Finland, Spain, Iceland, Portugal and elsewhere. The DRU has an interdisciplinary team focussed on digital content creation with practitioners and PhD students funded through NESTA Fellowships, Innovation Funding and the Arts Council.

All these programmes offer a further resource which feeds into the New Media Innovation course and its collaborative ventures, instigating major research opportunities for students, graduates, communities and business, as well as providing creative digital expertise from art practitioners and technologists. We are currently formulating plans to introduce more outreach projects by working with local community groups, introducing art practice to young people – a ‘first step’ preparation for entering academia.

Plans also include close collaboration with the Chartered Institute of Marketing as a vehicle for promoting research opportunities, placement, training and design consultancy advice to local business.

(Appendix 3+4).

BUILDING THE EMOTIONAL ENTERPRISE

Design captures and condenses into seductive graphic form the mood, concerns, inspirations, aspirations, fads, obsessions and stylistic tics of the day. It functions as a constantly updated report on how we live now.

(Poyner 2001)

Poyner describes communication design over the years and how it has proposed many roles for the designer to take on – most notably the political graphic designers of the 70’s and their impassioned, activist stance – a response to the cultural movement of the time. Ardent campaigners adopted an investigative journalist slant to their research (similar to Adbusters and Badvertising today) expressing themselves through a visual medium not just the written word.

Rick Poyner describes the role of designer as a ‘**Visual Journalist**’ he suggests the most effective visual communications captures the mood of the time and adds *“this inevitable by-product of designing will happen regardless”*.

Many designers already undertake a process of developing their expertise by researching, broadening knowledge and specialising in order to convey a story to others. But a shift of emphasis is required – total commitment to a particular subject matter, knowledge beyond the specific focus, integrating all elements related to the subject. The design shouldn’t be too abstract or disconnected from the message it’s trying to relay; ‘responsible journalism’ never losing sight of the real ‘point of view’; Designers should ask themselves - What are we trying to say and to whom? What do we hope to change?

Competition, technology, quality, economy in this global world is all fairly equal, to be successful in the twenty first century we have to pursue creativity and innovation. We need to appeal to the emotions of all concerned, to enable

true engagement and promote feelings of belonging. We have to disregard the normal and take risks if we are to achieve something different.

Ridderstrale and Nordstrom believe we have to develop 'Sensational Strategies' approaches that "Embrace our Emotions" three elements are crucial in achieving this, **Ethics, Aesthetics and Brands**. Aesthetics concerns all aspects of organization and how it deals with customers and colleagues from office architecture, packaging, sales people etc Branding, marketing and communication are all extensions of aesthetics.

In an emotional economy, it is better to piss off 90 per cent of the people while capturing the attention and interest of other 10 per cent, than to be merely OK to all of them...in the new world, OK, average and almost, wont do.

(Ridderstrale + Nordstrom 2000)

Designers have to consider the emotional aspirations of the client, the emotional involvement of their audience, and just as importantly their own emotional engagement.

CREATIVITY and the DESIGN PROCESS

In order to access true creative endeavour, there can be no substitute for the 'real thing' attaining understanding and realising meaning through real world experiences.

A major criticism levelled at creativity research and its applications, is that it lacks any scientific base or evaluation of effectiveness, focussing on idea generation rather than developing tangible solutions.

The creative outcome in design may be based on an enacted experience of use and not on the rationalization of imagery or represented forms.

(Periera, Illinois)

Not wishing to redefine creativity, most cognitive psychological research has focussed on concepts rather than concrete representation used when designing. It is generally accepted that creativity is "*the capacity to perform mental work that leads to an outcome both novel and applicable*" (Periera) so traditionally research views the creative individual as a mental entity who can be assessed by the imagery and concepts manipulated by the mind.

This abstract approach develops experiments with no real representation, what they fail to consider is that in reality, solutions do not get generated within a vacuum, they occur within the constraints and influences of the moment. In a real design situation, the subject or designer builds meaning around the problem, justifying the outcome, influenced by many variables driven by the environment and others. It is the experience of making and using design that achieves a true effective solution. In reality solutions to problems are determined by specific constraints and user needs – originality and innovation are born from **real interaction, experience and understanding**.

Therefore, meaningful communication between designer, client, managers, researchers and users, interacting in real situations, holds the greatest potential for creativity to flourish, be recognised and verified.

CREATIVITY the EMOTIONAL PRACTICE

Each designer should recognise themselves as an individual, and place their own experience into context; awareness of being a player with emotional influences. Introspection alone can be misleading, therefore, an individual's behaviour has to be considered and that of others around them, in order to gain an true reflection of oneself.

When a designer takes on a problem they put themselves in the situation of the user, design representations are then manufactured in order to capture the "wholeness" of the experience. The imagery reflected is a multidimensional result as well as an internal multisensory representation. Design is not just a message and memory aid but "*experience, understanding and synthesis*" (Periera) it is this inner built experience that remains central to the design process.

In an attempt to turn individuals into more creative professionals, creativity techniques concentrate on developing mental strategies that encourage diversity with the promise of a successful solution. Rarely do these approaches reflect and evaluate these methods. Again the focus is on mental process rather than other aspects of knowledge gathering, despite the fact that the required outcome is usually a concrete, tangible artefact not just a concept.

Damasio (1994) establishes the role of emotions in the process of decision making as our neurochemical link to the environment, so we know that the link exists and that we need it to live

(Periera)

If we fail to immerse ourselves in the creative act, fail to emotionally react as a designer we can't put ourselves in the "skin" of the user, we will not be able to empathise and make the right decision. We need a different research path to acquire this new perspective. In order to fully harness creativity we have to make the **Connection** that allows us to truly create.

Reflection in itself when adopted by a designer is usually a rational process taking little consideration of the role emotion plays. Our reflexive nature determines our emotions and regulates behaviour. Circumstances can shape our emotional nature and so we respond differently to emotion provoking situations.

Designers regularly deal with uncertainty, as reflection and emotion are closely linked, so must be considered as having an effect on the process of design. The role of meaning in design deals both with perceptual and conceptual knowledge. Conceptual is a metaphorical construction, whereas perceptual is a direct reproduction of experience in the mind. Hammer and Reymen (2001) believe for a designer to be truly reflexive they have to include emotions explicitly in the design process...

We consider reflection on a design process as an introspective contemplation on a designer's perception of the design situation and on the remembered design activities.

Only by taking an holistic view can balance be achieved, reflection should consider the input from all stakeholders, incorporating rationality and

emotions, the designer is not only an intellectual being but a human being and this depth of involvement should be acknowledged.

Stakeholders views should incorporate both rationality and emotions and should be based on the involvement of the whole personality of the respective person... This means not only technological views are incorporated, but also views related to the expected future use of the artefact and to its environmental, social, ethical and psychological impact.

(Hammer and Reymen 2001)

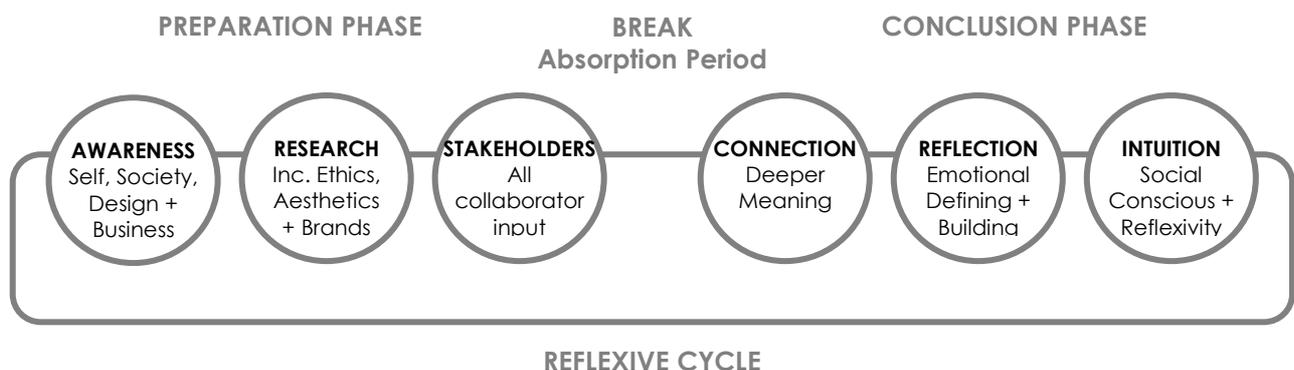
Giving importance to such emotions related to touch, usability, aesthetic and artistic values leads to a deeper understanding, this deeper meaning captures the essence of **Intuition**. Hammer and Reymen are concerned that personal bias will lead to mistakes, but if the process involves input from all collaborators, this will minimise the occurrence of error resulting in a truly holistic creative engagement and effective design solution. This in turn will allow designers to gain deeper insight into the human condition by participating in meaningful communication derived from emotional engagement.

"Intellectual growth... is to maintain that sense of inquisitiveness and the ability to be able to see connections; and in seeing those particular connections to be able to arrive at a synthesis of how things fit together, how things are integrated, how the world and the universe are as a whole. But also to realize that you are as a part of that whole don't necessarily understand it totally... there are exceptions, gaps in our understanding."

(Daloz 1999 Mentor; Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners)

EMOTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY and the CREATIVE DESIGN PROCESS

In conclusion; this fully integrated user centred approach and broad collaborative union is a means of engagement and practice, which considers the emotional investment and social conscience experienced by all participants, especially the designer themselves. The future of creativity in design can be embraced and challenged; this venture between the New Media Innovation course, Swamp Digital Consultants and CoEDD, supports Art and Design practice coupled with expertise in digital and emerging technology, propagating cross-collaboration, encouraging interdisciplinary creative diffusion and innovation. From this will emerge a new language by which we can communicate, define and contribute to society - designing for the real world.

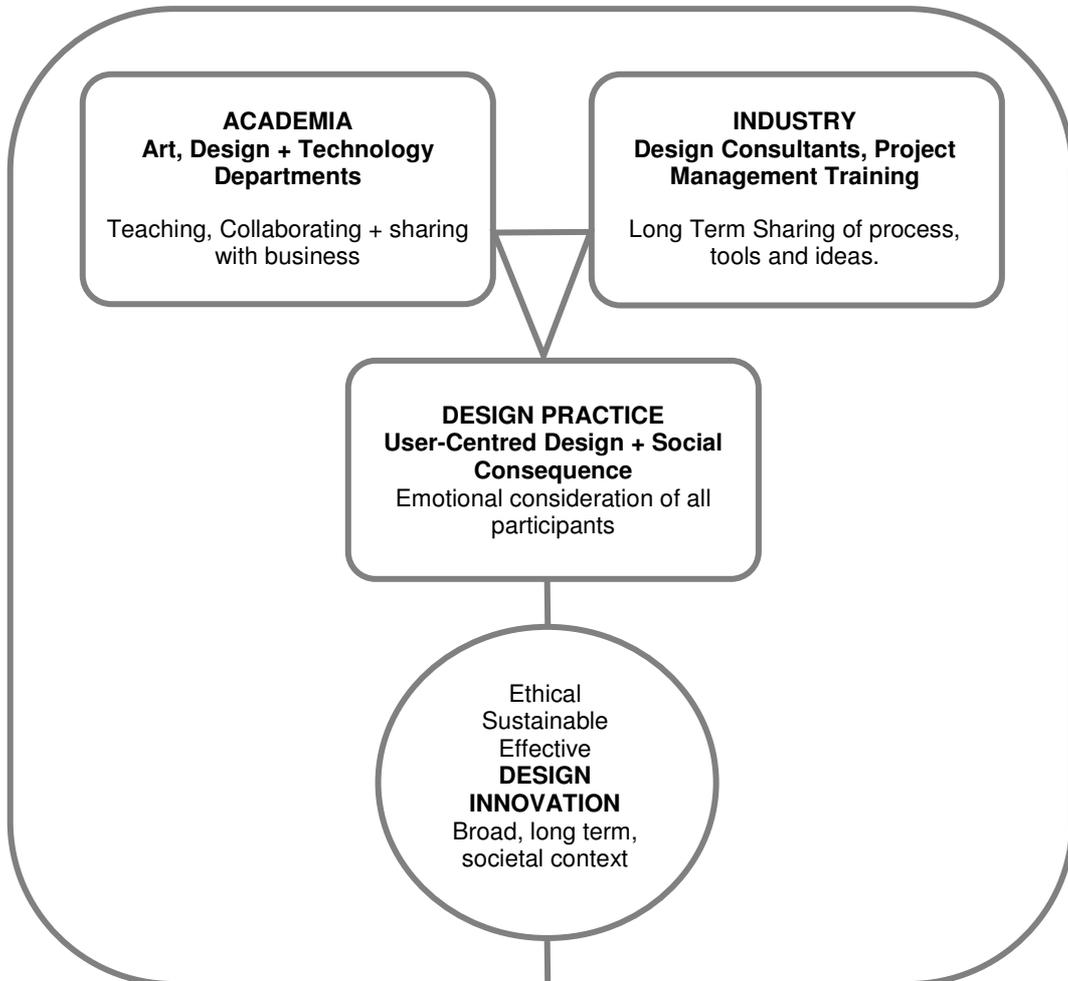


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Appendix 1

ETHNOGRAPHY



Communicable Language, Assessment + Reflexive Practice

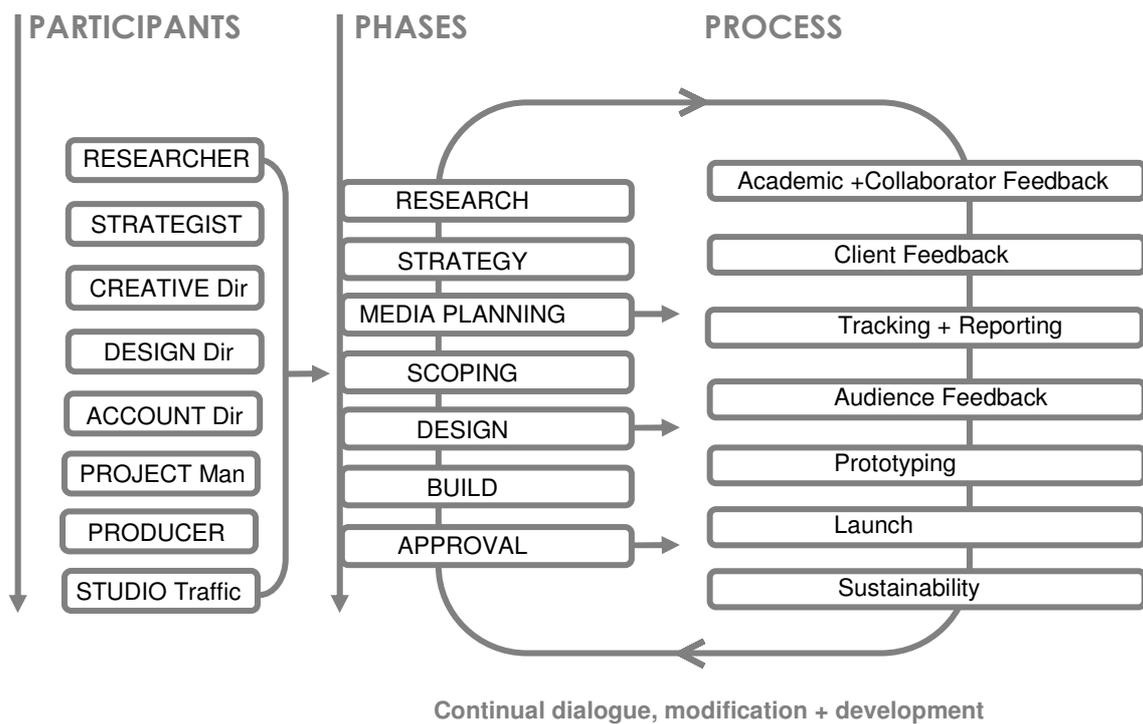
...Input from all major collaborators, engaging in shared practice.

Resulting in effective communication, creative solutions and a collective understanding.

Culminating in the formation of a new language to promote innovation and meaningful design engagement.

Appendix 2

CONNECTION ONE – Design Management Process



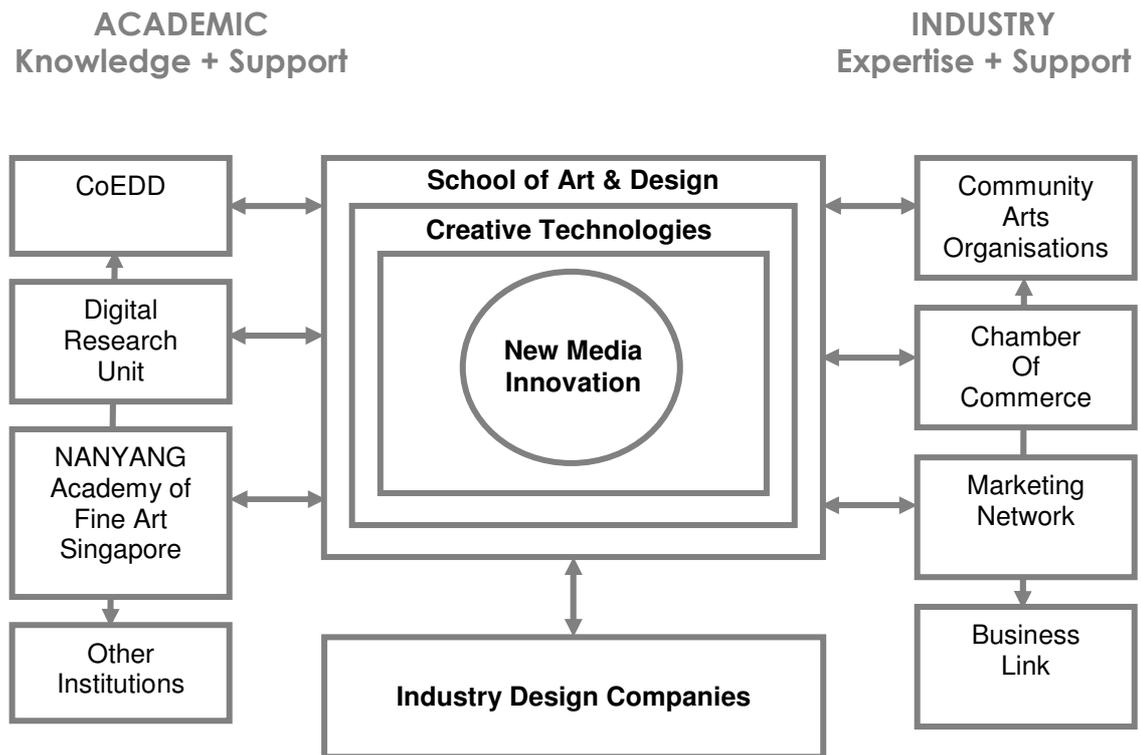
SWAMP Working Model

All design company participants liaise with academic representatives – researchers, media departments, design departments, social sciences, business and management – or whatever appropriate to any given project.

Interaction and feedback taking place at regular intervals throughout with all major contributors.

Appendix 3

CONNECTION TWO - COLLABORATION

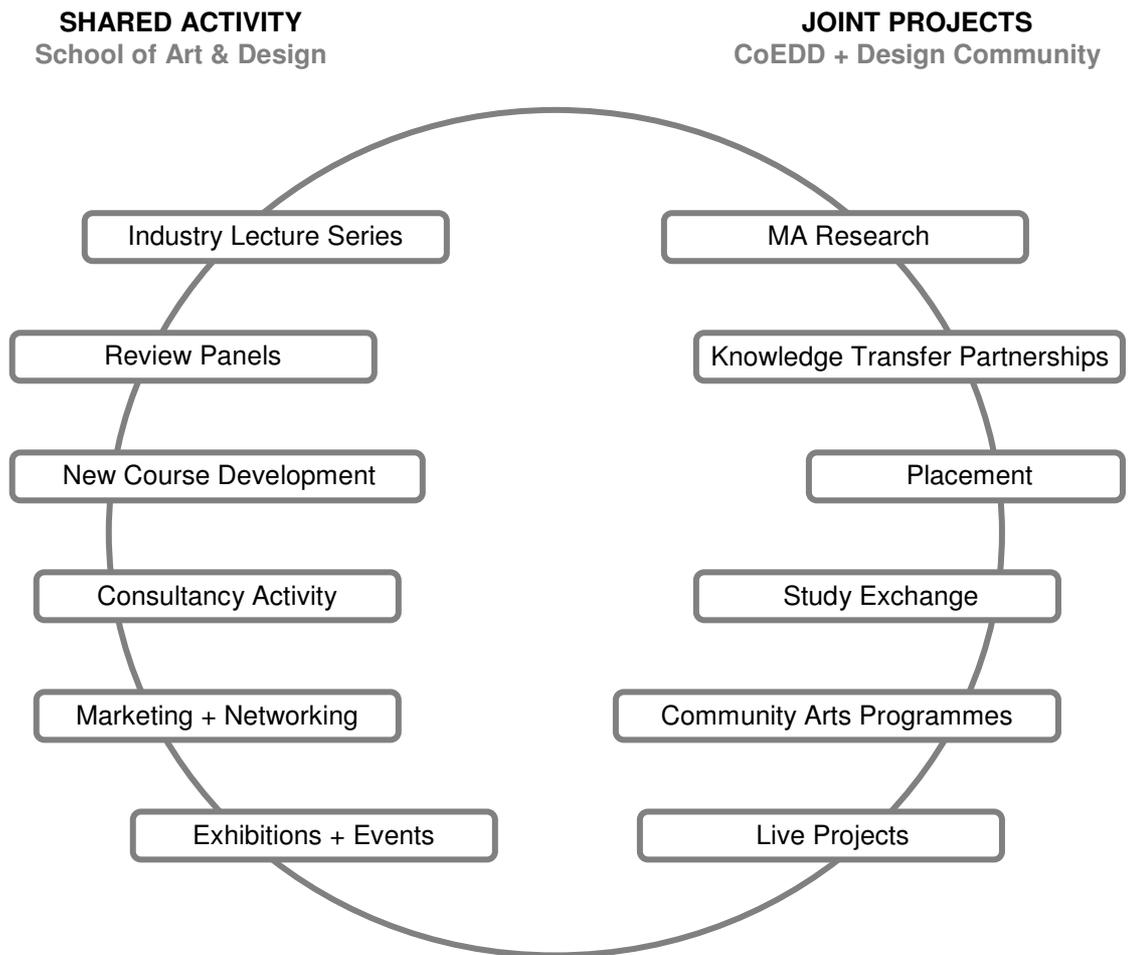


CoEDD

Industry and Academic expertise and can be available wherever appropriate

Appendix 4

CONNECTION THREE – Shared Activity



Academic and Design Communities

CoEDD acts as feeder institution facilitating collaborative ventures between academia and the design community via its creative digital cluster expertise