

Research: Design management boosts the effects of design

Researchers Chiva and Alegre devised a study to look into the effects of investment in design on business performance, and to provide insight into the role played by design management. The study used the definition of design management coined by Dickson et al (1995), which identified five design management skills:

1. The ability to manage basic skills of the design process (ability to realize high-quality design that can be produced at low cost).
2. The ability to manage specific skills of the design process, such as being able to use computer-assisted design tools.
3. The ability to involve third parties – such as suppliers and clients – in the design process.
4. The ability to manage change (for example: forge better collaboration among designers).
5. The ability to manage innovation processes.

The study focused on the question whether these five skills – which the researchers consider the essence of design management – can increase the output of design in terms of business performance.

Research data was gathered using questionnaires completed by 182 Italian and Spanish managers in the ceramic tile industry. The choice to focus on only one sector was a conscious one in order to exclude any disrupting industry-related effects, and ensure that possible differences in product characteristics would not influence the results of the study.

Based on the outcome of the study, the researchers drew the following conclusions:

- The study provides scientific underpinning for the hypothesis that design management boosts business performance;
- Investing in design is positively related to design management;
- Design investments only influence business performance when the company has a design management structure in place.

Nice design and investments in design alone will not automatically make a company or institution more successful. Design only contributes when it is the result of a carefully managed process. This process requires the development of certain skills. Investments in design are needed, but money alone is not enough. Design investments must be allocated in a well-thought out manner on the basis of the five abovementioned design management skills. People with

the right design management skills are indispensable in the realization of an efficient design process. Only then can design have a positive effect on business performance.

Reference(s)

Chiva, R., Alegre, J. (2009), Investment in design and firm performance: the mediating role of design management. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, vol.26, no.4, p.424-440. *

*: available in the EURIB library.