

The Complexity of Responsible Design - Key Factors Affecting the Consultant Industrial Designer's Opportunity to Implement Sustainable Design and Innovation.

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Since the beginning of the profession, industrial designers, fuelled by their adaptability (Sparke, 1983; Austin et al., 2007) have offered manufacturers a broad set of functions including styling, design for production, and human-centred design; to more recent involvement in innovation, strategy, and the creation of meaningful experiences (Lorenz, 1994; Stevens et al., 2008; Hargadon & Sutton, 2000; Olsson & Holm, 2009; Kotler & Rath, 1984; Cooper & Press, 1995; Zaccai, 1990). Throughout this evolution, however, the designer's main role has been constant: to assist in growing profits for their clients by designing distinct products which are appealing and desirable to consumers, and which entice them to purchase (Sparke, 1983; Meikle, 2001; Whiteley, 1993; Kotler & Rath, 1984; Cooper & Press, 1995; Heskett, 1980; Borja de Mozota, 2003; Amit, 2006; Zaccai, 1990).

Today, a growing recognition of the profound topics affecting society calls for designers to address additional goals beyond those associated with profit-making. Issues such as an ageing population, social inequalities and environmental crisis, coupled with an awareness of design's potential to have a more positive influence, have raised a wide felt concern (not least of all by designers themselves) for the implications and responsibilities of industrial design's current role (Sparke, 1987; Whiteley, 1993; Cooper, 2005; Fuad-Luke, 2009; Bhamra & Lofthouse, 2007; Walker, 2006). Design may well be "the most powerful tool yet given to man with which to shape his products, his environment, and, by extension, himself" (Papanek, 1984, p.102) but the real opportunity for designers to affect positive change is determined by a myriad of complex elements, seldom regarded or accurately accounted for in the debates and rhetoric surrounding these topics. There is a shortfall of knowledge on the actual influence the designer can have; what determines it; and what relationship designers themselves have with the system of factors within which they must operate.

This paper presents the findings from an explorative study carried out in the UK and Ireland as part of a doctoral research project. Using thematic analysis of data from a series of interviews and group workshops with prominent industrial design firms, academics, and consultants in related disciplines, it identifies the system of factors affecting the possibility for industrial design consultants to address the goals of sustainable and responsible design within their role for commercial clients. Emergent themes relating to the consultant's experience and motivations; project constraints; the remit of the designer in determining the product outcome; their relationship with the client; the product business case; and external influences, including those inherent to the commercial context, are described based on the realities of today's practices. From this, the key factors of influence and their interrelationships are highlighted, concluding with a discussion of the resultant complexity which is shaping the opportunities for consultant designers to commercialise sustainable design solutions within their current role.