RESEARCH TITLE

The development of a framework for postgraduate studies in communication design

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is the construction of a framework for the development of postgraduate communication design education in South Africa, and, as a workplace challenge to develop and improve course contents and delivery for postgraduate studies. Design is part of a widening domain and a fast changing environment that challenges all levels of design education and presents opportunities. The problem is framed by the general lack of postgraduate capacity in communication design in South Africa, a shortage of lecturers with a one-up qualification, limited local research capacity and the potential to innovatively create opportunities.

The study qualitatively explored the local communication design education landscape and identified the structures, nature, challenges and role players. This exploration included a closer look at the three leading higher education institutes in the South African postgraduate design space.

Theoretical models with the potential to guide the development of postgraduate design education were analysed. These are the Mode 1, 2 and 3 models, Innovation Triple-, Quadruple- and Quintuple Helix models, as well as research approaches that have the potential to better align academia with industry, such as practice-based and practice-led research, recognition of prior learning and work integrated learning.

One of the possibilities to increase capacity at postgraduate levels is to work closer with the design industry, and the study therefore gauged the perceptions, attitudes and needs of designers about postgraduate education. The findings confirmed a gap between industry and academia, with industry seeing the main role of academia as the provider of entry-level designers. No alignment between postgraduate degrees and designer's career paths exist and academic research is not seen as a valid or accessible source of knowledge.

Key findings and insights about the educational landscape, the theoretical models and the perceptions and needs of designers in industry formed the foundation for the development of a conceptual framework. The Frame Innovation approach, a problem solving method based on the processes used by expert designers, was used to direct the development of a framework that offers various possibilities. These possibilities take the widening domain of design into consideration through the conceptualisation of an open, collaborative space that would allow for the different interests of academia, industry, society and ecology and flexible research approaches.

The original contribution of the study is therefore the creation of an evidence based consolidated framework, that is systemic and has practical value for future development and implementation; that may increase capacity and align industry and academia beyond entry-level supply.

The full thesis can be found at http://www.openthesis.org/documents/development-framework-postgraduate-studies-in-603930.html