Designing and Developing Entrepreneurial Culture for a Small UK Based University

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An undeniable truth is the rise of status and responsibility assigned to Enterprise and Entrepreneurship within the UK Higher Education Institutions, as a means of crafting a more competitive economy. With a growing interest in this area from the Creative Industries, there is a need to articulate the entrepreneurship developments more often, and pinpoint where, how, and to what degree, design innovation management research is supporting this in a meaningful manner. It shares why the development of entrepreneurial culture has been purposefully designed and offers insight into how this has been achieved. This is to give a tangible example of design as a strategy for leadership.

The case study is a reflection on practice; a contemplative dialogue on design innovation management research as agency for cultural change and development of a process of becoming an entrepreneurial university. It is an example of work undertaken to create an outward-facing, more networked entrepreneurial culture within a small UK based university, as well as leveraging adjacent cultural and economic resources as part of a more entrepreneurial ecosystem within the residing city and country. It discusses a grand-scale entrepreneurial activity within a traditionally rigid structure i.e. a University, as a means of sharing how design innovation management can be used to nudge cultural change over the medium term and beyond design’s own discipline and culture. It captures the essence of concept development using a macro lens. In addition to deploying traditional methods, the work uses a dynamic participatory process, designed to grow iteratively and deliberatively working with people as collaborators throughout. The five key learnings shared are the importance of making entrepreneurship a strategic priority; employ design as a strategy for developing an entrepreneurial culture; uphold the act of being inclusive; value a strategically activist approach, and actively manage risk using design principles.

Keywords: Design, entrepreneurship, education, culture, knowledge exchange

Introduction: context and opportunity

In the UK’s Creative Industries, a sustained interest in enterprise and entrepreneurship education stems from a need to strengthen the sector’s business infrastructure; maximise its network (and its associated resilience), craft new engagements and heighten impact with other sectors. Additionally, its driven by a duty to innovate, with a concern to economically enhance and support its largely self-employed, freelancing practitioners, micro enterprises and small businesses (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2006; Clews, 2007; Dellot, 2014; Dellot and Wallace-Stephens, 2017). Lately, a further rise in status and responsibility for enterprise and entrepreneurship within UK Universities has occurred because, for example, of the EU’s ambition to be the most competitive economy, the QAA’s strategy for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education (2014, 2018) developed to capture impact while providing a roadmap for the future; the wider educational entrepreneurial
reports highlighting a pressing need for change in enterprise education and skills development (Universities Scotland, 2015; APPG, 2018) and the UK’s Industrial Strategy (BEIS, 2018) that fuels an exigency to be the most innovative economy via grand opportunities with ambitious modernisation.

In 2013, the University of Dundee in Scotland were looking to solve a problem and ended up transforming their idea into a new design-led Centre of Entrepreneurship in support of new business start-ups and cultural nudging. What began as a traditional academic exercise to manage resources with greater efficacy and impact, organically grew into an orchestrated partnership strategy with dedicated commitment, resource and investment from likeminded individuals across the full breadth of the organisation and its network. Through a four-year process (2013-17), the University of Dundee drew on a design for business innovation model to fashion new relationships, mobilise fresh ideas, secure investment and further cultivate an appetite for change by design towards entrepreneurship education for all subject specialisms. This curated a new product and a new service, thereby presenting a unique hyper-local offering in a growing competitive marketplace.

**Role and Expertise**

With an established design research and knowledge exchange background with experience of delivering impactful entrepreneurial projects (notably the conception and development of V&A Dundee) I began working in this area as the Director of Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise, before becoming academic lead for entrepreneurship. My vision (and place within an emerging pan University team) was to build upon the momentum. It was to develop a culturally developing recognition of design as a strategy for social and cultural transformation with economic impact that was occurring in the University, across the City of Dundee and Scotland more widely: design-led entrepreneurship. This understanding of design is a relatively new characterisation in the eyes of the general public and outside of the discipline of design.

In itself, V&A Dundee, Museum of Design exemplifies design-led entrepreneurship in three ways: 1) attracting a world leading brand, namely V&A, to Dundee which is a city of <150,000 people, 2) its manifestation as an award winning, world leading piece of architecture designed by the renowned Kengo Kuma and, 3) as an entrepreneurial example of design innovation management in terms of the process by which it was conceived, developed and realised (2007-2018), and its subsequent developing impact on social and cultural transformation of a small city (which is ongoing). Together these acts and levels of entrepreneurship are facilitating cultural change in terms of growth and behaviours: scale of ambition – collective and individual, creative confidence, policies and politics, perception of self, external perception of the City and its Universities as a game-changing community.

**Problem and Purpose**

In this case study, a relation between design, education and entrepreneurship is highlighted. It is a topic and set of relationships that are not well-established academically. In UK higher education institutions, entrepreneurship is predominantly offered as an extra-curricular service or activity; it is a subject largely confined to business and management schools, and it is uncommon to have it applied to and proactively used for developing University strategy.

Entrepreneurship education is slowly growing within teaching and learning programmes with an increased interest that is fueled by the new Teaching Excellence Framework. In the academic business of Research, entrepreneurship is similarly propelled by the impact agenda and responsibilities of the Research Excellence Framework; research council funded projects which seek to ignite new possibilities while concurrently comprehending the benefits of multi-million pounds investments in innovation, research and development, beyond the traditional confines of University environments.

Characterised as ‘the pursuit of opportunity beyond resources controlled’ by Professor Howard Stevenson, (Eisenmann, 2013) entrepreneurship in higher education is often taught through management frameworks, theories and case studies which are frequently hierarchical in nature. In this case study, design-led entrepreneurship is the lens with which operation is led; a middle-out centrally connected model. Its focus is on collaboratively creating new interdisciplinary activities with a commitment to regular active experimentation and meaningful output. Entrepreneurship is embedded as a life skill as much as business start-up and business growth process. Design as a strategy for change with its thinking tools and processes coupled with entrepreneurship brings design-led entrepreneurship: a capacity that is within us all; a mindset...
Design as a Socially Dynamic Principle for Driving Cultural Change

Phase 1: identifying, framing and defining the problem (September 2013 – October 2016)

Drawing on the work of the Creative Problem-Solving Group Inc., the LIMA Institute, John Maeda (2011), Liz Sanders (2013), Richard Buchanan (1995, 2001), Rachel Cooper (2011), Nesta UK, Neilson Norman Group, Design Council UK and the Hasso Plattner Institute’s design thinking research, the character of a design for business innovation and design-led entrepreneurship is one of inclusivity; a curious questioning mindset; an approach driven by a concern for value and love of people; collaboration and the act of co-conception and co-creation; visual thinking and the capacity to visualise; an iterative and rhetorical cycle of looking, listening and questioning which takes the form of physical and virtual making, testing and learning from an idea. The design knowledge, mindset and methodology were implicitly and explicitly used to create a basic infrastructure and roadmap for developing a more entrepreneurial culture. In addition, the globally growing interest in design for social innovation and social impact (Manzini, 2015, 2016), along with increasing attention for design thinking, design sprints, and agile management as tools for change also came to bear directly (Figure 1).

Figure 1 A visual summary (created and applied by the author in her work) of an example of a five-day design sprint developed through research and used to teach design enterprise as a socially dynamic process with an inherently entrepreneurial mindset. It employs design thinking for challenge led problems (such as breast cancer, mental health), and introduces the theories and practices of agile management, teamwork, prototyping, empathy, resilience, design process innovation techniques and design management research methods.

Drawing on design for business innovation management processes and design-led entrepreneurship experience, a series of activities were organised with an open-invitation to academic and central services staff (of all levels) across the organisation: three ‘Pollinate’ ideation workshops, three ‘Show and Tell’ seminars, three Creative Futures workshops, and four invited talks. The aim was to understand how we might raise
awareness of the increasing function of entrepreneurship in UK Higher Education across our institution and, ascertain where an appetite to engage and facilitate a change exists.

Upon this basis, an entrepreneurship strategy development workshop was held with a rich mix of (18) senior academic staff, central services managers (such as careers, academic skills, library, research, and innovation services), president of the student association, senior and executive management, specifically the Vice Principals of Teaching and Learning and, Research, Knowledge Exchange and Impact. It used the HEInnovate method and eight generic areas of entrepreneurship related to University business – entrepreneurial teaching and learning; knowledge transfer and collaboration; preparing and supporting entrepreneurs; organisational capacity - funding, people, and incentives; the internationalised institution; leadership and governance; and measuring impact – to provide a shared platform for the potential growth of entrepreneurship in our institution. Subsequently, two additional activities were orchestrated in support of extending the reach of people contributing to how entrepreneurship is shaped:

A shared experience; a visit to an established social enterprise with an accelerator programme, in a different city and not attached to a University. The objective was to gift people a physical experience of the design of a new dedicated facility for nurturing new business start-ups with a distinct brand and creative interior environment designed to a high specification. The point being that if we do not pay attention to our environment then people cannot act in ways that are consistent with their goals. If we do not learn from existing lessons, then progress cannot be made. With this metaphoric mirror, the design led activity was inviting everyone to practically ask: How are we going to create an environment that is consistent with our goal of becoming an entrepreneurial University?

An inaugural pan-University EE symposium (a precursor to the now established Entrepreneurship Week, an annual event) was held. Its entrepreneurial focus was the principles of design, social innovation, and social enterprise. 60 people from across the University and the wider City community, along with invited guests – business leaders, entrepreneurs, ambassadors, policy influencers - working at the coal face of entrepreneurship today, took part in this which included a second HEIinnovate workshop. The method of symposium was employed as a community improvement method and a listening exercise in terms of the perceived pain points and potential solutions when it comes to developing entrepreneurial ambitions and culture. It was used as an interactive learning tool and an awareness raising exercise about the intention of becoming an entrepreneurial University. The point being that we must actively listen to and dynamically engage with many people with a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences, in order to get closer to a fuller appreciation of what is actually needed by the community that we seek to service: to hold the principle of listening intently as a priority throughout the entire creative process of change and to make transparent the idea of transformation from the earliest point.

Visualisation and visual representation to communicate the outcomes of the HEInnovate workshop was strategically used because it captures the imagination and demands that information be processed in a rhetorical manner. This is critically important when managing an idea in a state of flux, especially ideas and visions which are embryonic. The visuals are seen to capture a moment in time within a creative process rather than offer a definitive description of an end point. They are used as facilitators of further conversation; a means to maintain ‘flow’ with and between people (Figures 2 and 3).
Figure 2 and 3: Upon completion of affinity mapping within the HEInnovate method, the results were visualised as a way of summarising the discussions and in figure 2 the visualisation of key pain points (which are denoted in red, on the left hand side) and the proposed key solutions in Figure 3 (denoted in green, on the right hand side) are associated with the strategic area ‘Preparing and Supporting Entrepreneurs’.

‘Becoming an Entrepreneurial University’ was the identified mission emerging from this dynamic participatory process, designed to grow iteratively and deliberatively working throughout with people as collaborators. Eight specified solutions (to the eight strategic challenges) and an accompanying series of 36 priorities for facilitating and achieving these changes were arrived at (Table 1).

Table 1 Details the eight strategic areas with the solutions and 36 priorities identified for enabling change

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<th>Strategic Challenge Area</th>
<th>Solution</th>
<th>Priority Activities</th>
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| Leadership and Governance                      | Metaphorically raise the anchor and permit the ship to explore; sail the seas to reach new shores | • Challenge the business culture  
• Encourage risk taking  
• Encourage people to get involved in EE leadership and governance  
• Provide coaching on EE  
• Talk less. Do more |
| Measuring Impact                               | Create alignment to the business strategy and group the impact measurement units; synchronise the energy between the different units. | • Broaden how we measure impact for EE  
• Better connect people and data to improve data management  
• Create a new framework for the very heavy load of DLHE |
| The Internationalised Institution              | Metaphorically, ‘the internationalised institution’ is a jumbo jet in flight. The proposed answer is to expand its flight paths and airports with more trained pilots and more aircrafts. | • Create clear, strong links between the University’s business plans and individual Schools  
• Embed more understanding of the international institution into the curriculum  
• Increase languages study offer |
| Entrepreneurial Teaching and Learning | Metaphorically, the space rocket is on the launchpad waiting to lift off. Prepare a strategy with a team of ‘astronauts’ to enable a successful journey into the wider galaxy of opportunity. | • Develop more flexibility between research, teaching and learning • Sandwich. University, International, Business • Include risk taking as a criterion in T&L assessment • Offer more practice • Include practical assessments • Offer choice • Promote mentoring and networking opportunities |
| Knowledge Transfer and Collaboration | When it comes to the subject of EE, people and communities are mute. Metaphorically, talking heads was the solution; to get people talking directly with each other about EE | • Value serious playtime • Engage in more collaboration and collaborative activities; • Join the dots; create a dynamic connected system • Create space(s) to think and act in this way • Unlock the doors; give Industry wider and greater access to University intelligence and facilities; make them feel welcome • Increase our global outlook |
| Organisational Capacity | There’s no petrol in the tank. Fuel up; insert gas into the tank so we can travel. | • Nurture Entrepreneurs (and intrapreneurs) • Be more cross disciplinary in nature and outlook • Grow staff development opportunities • Create an entrepreneurial study radar to detect opportunities • Invest more in innovation |
| Preparing and Supporting Entrepreneurs | Care from the roots up. Feed the ‘EE plant’ for the continued sustenance of innovation and ideas. | • Hire strategically • Grow ambition and aspirations • Facilitate the change through creativity • Create new measures and new measurements • Be radical • Create staff rewards • Design ecosystem |

These aforementioned activities ran parallel with the development of a new Entrepreneurship Strategy led by the Entrepreneur in Residence and a new EE University Working Group of which design was an integral voice. This included an initiative where each School within the University appointed an academic lead for the development of EE across their educational disciplines. The activities and decision-making processes culminated in a commitment to invest and provide a new purposefully designed Centre of Entrepreneurship.

The creation of a dedicated centre of entrepreneurship ensued (opening to the public in September 2017). A flagship offering for staff, students and the local community to use for the development and growth of new business start-ups: a strategic partnership with Elevator UK whereby an innovative new, open access, public-facing, stand-alone facility was designed and developed to offer a suite of services, mentoring, and investment awards, in the pursuit of identified new goals. It organises 50+ events each calendar year: including Entrepreneurial Masterclasses, an Entrepreneurship Week, a Venture pitching competition (£27.5k fund annually with the School of Art & Design taking the position of most entrepreneurial School for the past three years), and large public lectures with leading entrepreneurs including Josh Littlejohn MBE, Mark Beaumont BEM and Mike Souter. It also boasts the first University strategic partnership with Entrepreneurial Scotland and is strategically building on Dundee’s global reputation for design innovation and research (Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, UNESCO City of Design, V&A Dundee Museum of Design). The facility is one of the first entrepreneurial centres in the world to capitalise on a design-led approach in the way that start-up and
scale-up businesses are guided. It draws on this rich resource to apply ‘design thinking’ into the Entrepreneurial mind-set of the businesses within the centre along with specific design-led sessions delivered by V&A Dundee. Linking to this the university delivers a unique Design for Business MSc developed in parallel with V&A Dundee which has a close relationship with the Centre.

Key Learnings: Reflection on Practice

The case study is a contemplative dialogue on design innovation management research as agency for cultural change and development of a process of becoming an entrepreneurial university. It has not detailed the concurrent policy developments made or showcased all of the project work, partnership developments, advocacy, industry input, teaching initiatives and-or management meetings. The intention is not to diminish these procedures and junctions, rather to hold focus on the higher-level strategic use of design to fashion new strategic relationships to mobilise cultural change together in a middle-out centrally connected manner. To redirect attention from this would undermine the accomplishment of design for transformation within a University to secure investment and further cultivate an appetite for change towards entrepreneurship education for all subject specialisms.

The five key learnings to share are not rocket science but they are nonetheless imperative:

1. Make entrepreneurship a priority and place strategic importance on making time and resources available to find and network with new, likeminded people across three geographical levels - international, national, and local with a focus on entrepreneurship;
2. Employ design as a strategy for developing an entrepreneurial culture and when employing design and its middle-out centrally connected model, maintain respect for the hierarchy of current University structures; achieve executive buy-in to the use of design as a strategic tool from the outset with further sponsorship from academia, industry, external agencies and organisations to sustainably build on this;
3. Uphold the act of being inclusive and the design innovation management of fun, freedom, and friction to help achieve this;
4. Value a strategically activist approach to design innovation management to ensure the integral use of design as an agency of change from the outset;
5. Actively manage the risk taking involved when building a fresh collective of community champions for entrepreneurship through the principles of design

All five insights are risks needing to be managed with an entrepreneurial mindset, that of agility, resilience, gumption, and tenacity. The use of design innovation management as a framework is advocated to enable the sustained openness and the perpetual cycles of divergent and convergent thinking required. This is vital as it brings a mindset that views fear as a friend rather than a foe, which is necessary as getting it wrong – often and in small ways – is needed in order to get it right.

This was a large ambitious endeavor filled with complexities and politics, and in terms of capability building, the most challenging was the fact that the nature of design as a strategic process is (largely) antithetical to public facing hierarchical organisations, therefore learning to dance with this political tension becomes the job when seeking to advocate design as a strategic organisational and cultural development asset. Sustained investment in collaborative actions, innovative experiments, and activities by and through design were instrumental.

Design for social and cultural transformation is a long-term commitment to strategy and community. Drawing on V&A Dundee we know that from the point of conception to the point of delivery is a deeply intensive 10-year collaborative process. Going forward, the challenge for design as a tool for developing entrepreneurial culture is to measure the impact of applying the knowledge and practices of design for business innovation management to business, culture and society. It is to collaboratively engage in research to evidence the impact and value, thereby delineating what design is beyond the traditional and popular boundaries of products and services.
References


