



SHARING EXPERIENCE EUROPE
POLICY INNOVATION DESIGN

Case Studies in Design Policy & Programmes

This case study was developed as part of the SEE project. SEE is a network of eleven European partners sharing experience and stimulating debate on how to integrate design into innovation policies at regional, national and European levels.

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Design Ladder

Demark

The Design Ladder was developed by the Danish Design Centre (DDC) in 2003 as a tool to measure the level of design activity in Danish businesses. The Ladder, used as a framework for a survey, was the first step in developing a method to assess the economic benefits of design in Denmark.

The extent to which design may enhance creativity, innovation and competitiveness depends on a company's use of design. The DDC was convinced that design-driven companies were far more likely to develop new products compared with those that were not. Therefore in 2003, to prove their point to industry, the DDC in association with the Danish National Agency for Enterprise launched a survey to assess the economic benefits of design.

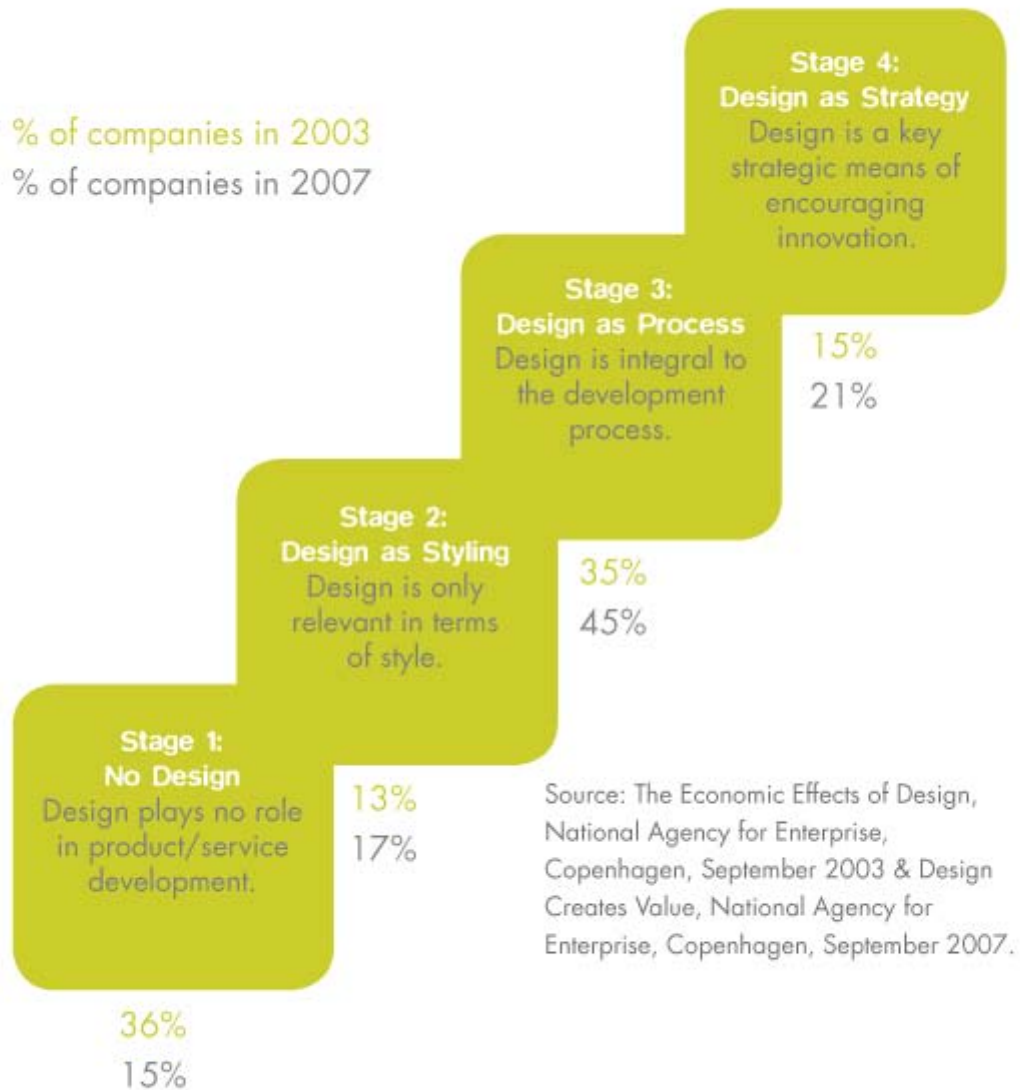
The survey examined the design investment of 1,000 companies chosen from four groups of businesses (10 to 19; 20 to 49; 50 to 99; and 100-plus employees). Companies were categorised into four stages of design maturity depending on their approach to design investment. The higher a company was ranked on the Design Ladder, the greater strategic importance they attributed to design. In order to raise awareness of the benefits of design in industry, it is vital to encourage companies to move up the scale. The DDC has developed a series of courses and training programmes to enable companies to progress including several recently launched modules relating to product branding, design briefing, the design process, new materials and user-driven innovation.

The main conclusions from the survey were that Danish companies invested an annual total of approximately DKK 7 billion (EUR 1 billion) in design. Over the five years prior to 2003, Danish companies that purchased design registered a total increase in their gross revenue of approximately 22% (DKK 58 billion ≈ EUR 8 billion) higher than companies that did not purchase design. Linking performance data with investment in design revealed a correlation between design purchase and economic growth. The DDC intended the survey to serve not only as input for drafting a new national design policy but also to provide solid economic data to support discussions with corporate businesses. Indeed, the survey data was fundamental in demonstrating the importance of promotional activity within design to the Danish government. Consequently, in September 2003, the Danish government adopted a four-year national design policy as one of five new strategic initiatives to promote economic development called Denmark in the Culture and Experience Economy.

The survey was repeated in 2007. By indexing the companies according to the four profiles, the Design Ladder provides an assessment of how many companies actually moved up a rung on the ladder over the course of four years. The result revealed that, between 2003 and 2007, the distribution of Danish companies at stage three of design maturity rose from 35% to 45% and the number of companies at stage four rose from 15% to 20%. The Design Ladder also serves as a model for explaining to companies that design is more than merely product styling; meaning that companies can reflect on their own way to incorporate design into their business know-how.

The Design Ladder is proving to be a successful tool for evaluating design promotion. This comes at a time when the absence of effective indicators to evaluate the economic benefits of design seems to be a major obstacle to discussions on an effective design policy or strategy at the regional, national or European levels. Not surprisingly, the methodology has been referred to and even adopted by initiatives in other European countries including Austria, Sweden and Switzerland. However, it is important to highlight that a key issue for a successful measurement process is a systematic evaluation. Only the collection of data in consecutive periods will provide comparative data and therefore, meaningful results. Consistency seems to be key in the successful development of the Danish method. By assessing how many companies move up a rung on the Design Ladder once design promotion and policies have been implemented, the Danish government has a tangible assessment of the role of design in industry.

The Design Ladder



Design Ladder: four stages of design maturity

Stage One: No Design

Design plays little or no role in product or service development. For instance, product and service development is performed by personnel who are not design professionals. The utility of the end-user tends not to be considered.

Stage Two: Design as Styling

Design is only relevant in terms of aesthetic considerations such as style, appearance and ergonomics.

Sometimes professional designer may be involved but styling will be predominantly purchased internally or from professionals in other sectors.

Stage Three: Design as a Process

Design is considered in terms of a process or method in product or service output but is only employed at the initial stages of development. The design solution is procured externally and is adapted to the requirements of the end-user using a multidisciplinary approach.

Stage Four: Design as Strategy

Design is integral to a company's continuous renewal of their business concept as a means of encouraging innovation. The design process is fused with the company's key objectives and plays a role at every stage of development.

For more information please contact: Danish Design Centre www.ddc.dk