



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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Innovation by Design

(IRELAND)

Innovation by Design was a mentor-led programme based on best practice in Europe and the US, operating from June 2007 to September 2008. Developed by the *Centre for Design Innovation* in Sligo, Ireland, the programme involved six SMEs across a range of sectors – software, manufacturing and services – based in the northwest of Ireland. Each company participated in a tailored programme that enabled them to develop innovative products and services and to generate competitive advantage well beyond the end of their involvement in the programme.

To formulate the programme, the Centre hosted the event ‘Meeting of Minds’ with key design practitioners from the UK, USA and Ireland who had extensive experience of running SME design programmes. Research from this event and the user-centred work by IDEO, Ziba and the D-School in the US, as well as the UK Design Council’s Designing Demand programme, formed the basis of the methodology which conceptually defined the Innovation by Design programme.

‘Ten Commandments’ to guide the programme’s interaction with companies:

1. Invest time in the selection process
2. Speak their language
3. Don’t scare them with too many details
4. Be explicit about rewards
5. Establish a diary at the outset
6. Understand the psychology of a diverse team
7. ‘Who are the users? What do you know about them?’
8. Pick good stories
9. Have a contingency
10. Learn from others who have conducted similar programmes

From an initial list of 200 companies, devised from recommendations by government support agencies on which SMEs would benefit most from the programme and would be willing to commit to such an initiative, a final group of six companies was selected.

Two Design Associates with extensive experience in design support, industry and research engaged with the companies at various points to facilitate the programme’s aims and objectives. The 18-month programme had a total budget of €120,000. The cost to each company was €1500, for which it received two network days, three workshops and 5–7 days of mentoring sessions. The real cost was around €10,000 per company. The network events occurred roughly every three months, including workshops on specific issues such as branding or product development,

and an online site was created to manage communications and provide a digital forum for the organisations to communicate at any time. In these activities, the non-competitive network was crucial and of unique value.

Within 15 months each company applied a design approach to understanding customers’ needs first, which is key to identifying the right ideas to commercialise. Avenue Moulding mapped its service offering, developed a well-received quick-start mould manual for its customers and engaged with a new design firm. Connacht Gold engaged with Institute of Technology Sligo design students and staff to develop a range for 12-month and 5-year product concepts. Elements of the work have been incorporated in new product marketing. Infacta is completing a rebranding programme of its company and has hired a full-time designer. Mantis Cranes made over two dozen design modifications to a developing crane and implemented a new product-development process. The Institute of Technology Sligo rebranded the college. Ireland West Airport made adjustments to its check-in and queuing procedures, as well as fixing an issue with its luggage trolleys and developing concepts for new, sustainable and better-designed trolleys to enhance the passenger experience.



Innovation by Design workshop on user-centred design in Sligo, Ireland (2007)

According to Justin Knecht, the Programme Manager, the Design Associates were key to the success of the programme: ‘Programmes cannot be just a series of workshops, they require mentoring to facilitate the adoption of tools and define discrete projects. The content was practical, relevant, hands-on and able to be implemented immediately by the participating companies.’ The six case studies generated from the companies that participated are relevant to a broad range of SMEs. Although there are lessons to be learned from multinationals like Apple and Toyota, regional case studies of similar size and scope have greater resonance.

The CEO of the airport commented, ‘Now we’re really ready to use design, what are we going to do with you next?’ It was recommended that a follow-on programme be created to build on the initial success; help fund larger-scale projects; and integrate design processes and tools holistically throughout each organisation’s structure to move them towards a design culture. These programmes need a planned process for building on initial small wins and turning them into sustainable change. ●

For more information visit: www.designinnovation.ie