



IMP<sup>3</sup>rove

European Innovation Management Academy

# Promoting design as a driver for innovation

Case Example

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## Promoting design as a driver for innovation

This case demonstrates how the IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy contributed to the planning and execution of an awareness-raising event on design-driven innovation management organised by a member of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN).

### The stakeholders

In recent years, “design” has been identified as a key enabling factor for fostering innovation activities within organisations across industries and regions alike. In order to leverage this enabling factor on a regional level, a member of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) wanted to raise awareness for this topic among key stakeholders of the regional innovation eco-system, encompassing representatives of small to medium-sized companies (SMEs), investors, business advisors and intermediaries.

### The stakeholders’ need/demand for innovation management support

A lot of discussion has been going on about how to utilise design methods, skills, and tools in order to foster innovation within firms. A number of case studies published in academic journals, blogs and newspapers outline the benefits of design approaches in a given situation. Yet, many companies, and especially SMEs, are still not aware of the benefits that design approaches offer to them beyond the tangible design domains, such as product or graphic design. Moreover, many firms struggle with transferring these approaches to their particular business contexts and managing design holistically within the firm. Hence, design-driven innovation initiatives often remain at a workshop level and many companies do not fully exploit the potential that design offers on a strategic and organisational level.

For these reasons, intermediaries and business advisers play a pivotal role in spreading the knowledge of design-driven innovation among firms and in helping them to implement design processes, skills, and tools on a sustainable basis. However, a large share of intermediaries and business advisers struggles with supporting their clients on design-driven innovation topics, given that the explorative and iterative nature of the most-widely used design approaches are perceived to be contradictory to their traditional, more linear consulting approaches. Consequently, in order to spread the use of design further, there is also a training demand among intermediaries.

Finally, given prominent examples of high-growth design-driven companies, and a number of studies indicating a positive relationship between design orientation of firms and financial firm performance, investors have also become interested in design as a driver of innovation. Yet, for many of these stakeholders, design remains a “fuzzy concept” that is difficult to measure and to extract from other factors influencing firm performance. Thus, if design shall be considered in the frame of investment decisions as well, and thereby further support its widespread use, frameworks and measurement approaches need to be communicated to financial actors, too.

### IMP³rove support provided

A member of the Enterprise Europe Network, who realised the stakeholder needs outlined above on a regional level, sought to address these needs by organising an awareness-raising event on design-driven innovation management at their premises. IMP³rove Academy supported this initiative from the very start. First, the scope of the event in terms of the content and participants was defined jointly. Building on IMP³rove Academy’s expertise in the given field, it was recommended to start the session with a holistic overview on design-driven innovation management by demonstrating frameworks, tools, and best practice examples. Moreover, it was proposed to enrich this session with an interactive workshop format, that shall enable the participants to experience the benefits of design in class. Second, IMP³rove Academy contributed to the event organisation by proposing a second speaker beyond an IMP³rove Academy staff member. In more detail, IMP³rove Academy

suggested to take over the presentation of design-driven innovation management as a holistic concept and proposed to invite another guest speaker from IMP³rove Academy's European network of experts in this field. This expert should have complementary capabilities that are required for facilitating design-driven innovation activities on an operational basis. Third, the EEN member and IMP³rove Academy jointly decided to invite a proper mix of stakeholders, rather than only one group, in order to spur on the topic discussion between the groups. In doing so, it was hoped that the multi-stakeholder perspective would contribute to a joint understanding of how to foster and utilise design-driven innovation within the local innovation eco-system.

### **Impact achieved**

*Almost 50 stakeholders from the local innovation ecosystem participated in the awareness-raising event. The discussions with the participants during and after the session already indicated an increased interest in the topic. Moreover, many stakeholders confirmed that they gained clarity on the concept of design-driven innovation management and some indicated interest in further assessing opportunities for implementing design methods within their firms or within their clients' firms respectively. Most notably, a representative from a locally-based company, whose business model was significantly affected by an unforeseen shift in the market, perceived the presented methodologies to be of particular importance for adapting their current business model. In turn, IMP³rove Academy sent further materials about related innovation management methods and tools to this company and remained at their disposal for providing further assistance on this topic.*

### **Potential way forward**

This awareness-raising event provides a blue print for spreading the knowledge on design-driven innovation management across Europe and beyond. Moreover, further comparable events would contribute to a shared language of design-driven innovation among the various stakeholders of the innovation ecosystem. This shared language will be instrumental to effectively spur on innovation and create business impact. Hence, IMP³rove Academy is looking forward to exploring further opportunities for co-organising such events.

## About IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy

The IMP³rove - European Innovation Management Academy, non-profit ([www.improve-innovation.eu](http://www.improve-innovation.eu)) offers innovation management support services to enterprises, consultants and intermediaries. It also provides financial actors, policy makers and academia with consulting support and technical assistance related to innovation and innovation management. The services include innovation management benchmarking for enterprises, training and certification in innovation management, research on innovation management issues and promotion of best practices in innovation management. With its global network, the IMP³rove Academy has set the standard for innovation management assessment. The IMP³rove- European Innovation Management Academy emerged from the European Commission's flagship programme "IMP³rove". It was supported by the European Commission's Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme and receives continued support by Horizon2020.

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