

CREATING THE RIGHT KIND OF DESIGN INNOVATION CENTRES

The Objective of the New Design Innovation Centres

As manufacturing has become smarter, industry has focussed on producing "perfect" products. In the process, innovation in design has suffered, and product design has become repetitive. Such design has to compete on the basis of either manufacturing cost advantage, or invention of new technology -- which too requires large funds. However, innovation can be frugal, and be based only on a new concept. Apple's success is not built on invention but innovation. That is why US President Obama has said, "[A]ll of us must recognize that education and innovation will be the currency of the 21st century", and the President of India said in her inaugural address to Parliament for the present Government, "My Government will ensure that its policies for education and science and technology are imbued with a spirit of innovation so that the creativity of a billion people is unleashed." **Therefore, the new Design Innovation Centres should focus not on teaching design in traditional ways but on innovative design.**

Compared to developed countries, India is quite young in design education. Most Indian design schools take their cue from design education in the West. This alone cannot equip our industry to compete with the West on innovative design. **We need to also build on the strong Indian design traditions in arts, crafts and products of everyday use, and assume global leadership through branding of such innovative product design.** Unfortunately, design schools in India have not focussed on such concepts. Creating innovative products that synthesise the old in a new concept, without losing the essence of cultural heritage, have immense potential of giving us leadership in the field of design.

How to Create the New Centres

Producing more of the same is easy, and infrastructure and faculty availability constraints offer ready justification for preferring growth of existing design programmes to seeding new ones. But if the design innovation centres have to be pioneers of a different approach to competitive design, we must look beyond ready basic infrastructure and teaching faculty in existing design schools. The critical challenge is recruiting design faculty. Inadequacy of teaching faculty is not unique to India but a global phenomenon. Given this, **the new centres would have to be built around a core group of three to four faculty members who would teach the foundation/core courses** in Product Design, Visual Communication and Ergonomics. This core group could be **supported by visiting faculty/professionals from other institutions and industry** to teach specialised courses, **and by inviting faculty from other related departments** (in humanities, social sciences, sciences and engineering) for the interdisciplinary curriculum. **Universities/institutions linked to the National Knowledge Network can pitch in through virtual classrooms and creation of a networked design community.** NPTEL design course material can be leveraged and expanded.

In most cases in India, design has been included under the mechanical engineering department. However, a design school is conceived of as neither engineering nor art but a synthesis of various disciplines. To ensure that educators in both the new centres and their host academic institutions understand the difference between engineering design and design as a profession, and the ethos of an innovative design curriculum and its teaching pedagogy, it is necessary that **the new centres, from their inception, include not only science and engineering institutions but also universities, architecture schools and art schools.** Further, an **Advisory Committee on Design Education and Innovation** may be set up, with a balanced composition, to guide curricular and institutional development: a note on the same is attached.