

CONVERSATION TEMPLATE: FINAL SUBMISSION**Abstract**

Design Thinking has gained recognition as an acclaimed process for generating innovative, human centred solutions at a social and business level. It has also gained notoriety amongst many designers, who claim that its success as an exported element of the design process has resulted in its commodification, and led to it becoming a diluted series of processes that lack criticality. As design disciplines and the role of designers continue to evolve, we should reflect on design thinking's original context and understand its progression into a non-design world. Our hypothesis is that design thinking has reached a 'peak' in contemporary practice, and as the term 'design' is further adapted and conformed to suit a business function, this conversation will elicit a constructive debate on the future of design thinking and its positioning within design and non-design industries. Has Design Thinking's commodification and consumption as a step by step road map to innovation reduced it to a mainstream approach? Or can we use the undoubted successes of design thinking as a catalyst for future design research? It is anticipated that through analysis and discussion, this conversation will inform the conceptualisation of enhanced methodological frameworks that aim to support innovation across divergent industry practices.

Proposed Conversation Title

HAVE WE REACHED PEAK DESIGN THINKING? Are we entering a new paradigm for how it is used within practice and business?

Keywords: 1; Design thinking; 2; design practice 3; design skills, 4; non-design disciplines

1. Convenors Information

Convenor Name	Email	Affiliation
Michelle Douglas	Michelle.douglas@griffith.edu.au	Griffith University, Australia
Dr Louise Kiernan	louise.kiernan@ul.ie	University Limerick, Ireland
Jon Spruce	J.Spruce@ljmu.ac.uk	Liverpool John Moores University, UK
Dr. Annmarie Ryan	annmarie.ryan@ul.ie	University Limerick, Ireland

2. Context of Conversation Topic

The focus of this conversation is to elicit a constructive debate on the future of design thinking within design practice and non-design industries. Our hypothesis is that design thinking has

reached a 'peak' in contemporary practice and business. We seek to establish patterns and conversational data that can be used as the basis for further research.

Although there is still no clear description of Design Thinking (Kimbell, 2011), it has been hailed as design's greatest export. However, Design Thinking has opposing opinions; from a 'failed experiment' (Nussbaum, 2011) to an enabler of innovative solutions for multi-faceted problems within society and businesses (Brown, 2009). As Design Thinking approaches 'peak' status in its diffusion into corporations, can we accept that 'everyone is a designer' in a complex world (Huffington Post, 2014)?

This conversation addresses the commercialization and commodification of design thinking, as it circulates freely outside of the design disciplines. On one hand, rather than seeing the commodification as negative, some argue that this has benefited design and raised its importance and use. As design disciplines continue to evolve and respond to technology and social needs, (Buchanan, 1992) business strategists have recognised the power of design thinking (Martin, 2009), and it is taught widely by business faculty across the world. Organisations employ it across many functions, including NPD, marketing and branding etc. However, there is increasing disquiet amongst the design community regarding its misuse and dilution, leading to the devaluing of design as a skilled practice (Vinsel 2017).

"Today's design thinkers lack craft, lack intellectual foundations, and can't make things." (Kolko 2018)

Common in the criticisms is a decoupling of design and design practice, or more specifically designers. Here design thinking is regarded as a sales commodity where designers themselves have become obsolete. Many in the design community believe that design thinking needs to have designers involved to bring the skills of problem solving, sketching, building, making, exploring and doing that have been developed over time. Without these skills design thinking will remain at a superficial level. This has led to a push for innovation within the design sector where the relevance of designer's expertise is maintained. There is ample scholarly activity to constitute a debate and conversation from both a sceptical and pro-design thinking perspective, which will aim to utilise a mixture of viewpoints from both design and non-design disciplines to construct a new direction for research in this area.

2.1 Review

It is our intention to gather data from the conversation on the day of the event to be used in further research on this topic. Having checked ethics requirements via the DRS2018 panel, it is our understanding that by attending the conference and participating in the conversation, participants understand that they are participating in ongoing research. However, we will propose to produce consent forms and gain consent from participants prior to (or at the beginning) of the conversation event. It is our expectation that the DRS audience (while design oriented) would also have a variety of experiences to share on how Design Thinking is applied beyond design, and will contribute greatly to developing a dialogue around the variety of approaches and contexts that Design Thinking is being used within, both inside and outside of immediate design led activities. As convenors of this conversation, we have a mixture of diverse skillsets and research interest specific to Design Thinking that span both business *and* design schools.

3. Conversation research question

How can we use the success of Design Thinking as a catalyst for producing more and effective methodologies that can be applied and adapted by other disciplines?

The conversation will promote dialogue and elicit experiences from the audience, enabling the identification of varying approaches in the application of design thinking. For example, are there discernible disconnects between design thinking as employed by non-designers, and the design process, as practiced by designers? The conversation may reveal high levels of plurality in the application of design thinking amongst these different groups, and identify common elements in determining degrees of success or failure. Through analysis and discussion, the conversation will inform the conceptualisation of enhanced methodological frameworks that aim to better support innovation across divergent industry practices.

4. Set-up of your session

Section 1: background. 10 min: **Led by Ann-Marie Ryan, twitter feed managed by Jon Spruce. We will be using #peakdesignthinking ahead and during of the conference to gain perspectives before and during the event.**

The participants will be introduced to the format of the session and invited to respond via twitter throughout the session. The background to the topic will be provided.

Section 2: choose your position. 10 min: **Facilitated by Jon Spruce**

A number of position statements will be posted around the room. Delegates will be asked to sit nearest the statement they identify most as part of a participatory exercise that enables the conveners to better curate the discussion based on who is in the room.

Section 3: Discussion. 1 hour: **Chaired by Michelle Douglas**

Conversation questions will be posed between the conveners and delegates to discuss and debate the theme.

Section 4: the path forward. 30 min: **Chaired by Louise Kiernan**

Solutions will be proposed and discussed as to how we can use the success of Design Thinking as a catalyst for producing more and effective methodologies that can be applied by other disciplines.

5. Type of space and equipment required

A/V facilities including large screen, computer hdmi/DVA adapters, sound, post-its and flip charts/white boards. Digital screen for constant live twitter feed. Wall space for posters.

6. Dissemination strategy

1. **Immediate dissemination** will be based on sharing insights with participants of the workshop, via the collation of twitter feed comments, the recording and collation of notes from the conversation, Photograph and AV footage of the whole event.

7. References

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About the Convenors:

Convenor 1: Michelle Douglas is a senior design academic with global experience. Her research interests are in design ecosystems and practice and the value of design in geographic regional contexts. She lectures on design thinking, collaborative practice and experience design at Masters level.

Convenor 2: Dr Louise Kiernan is a product design lecturer at the University of Limerick. She has sixteen years of industry experience as a senior design engineer and product designer. Her research interests include, team collaboration, design education and design for health.

Convenor 3: Jon Spruce lectures in the design of objects and spaces, his research interests focus on exploring how design education may be developed through increased dialogue and understanding between academics, the design industry, users of design services and consumers of design

Convenor 4: Dr Annmarie Ryan is a Lecturer in Business Marketing. Her research interests relate to interaction and relationships between business and the arts, and on lived experience of interdisciplinary working. Her work has been widely published in marketing and management literature.