

# EDMOJO: CO-CREATION OF DESIGN EDUCATION BY INDUSTRY AND INSTITUTE TO PREPARE FOREIGN STUDENTS TO ENTER THE LOCAL JOB MARKET

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## ABSTRACT:

Design education is increasingly becoming an international affair with top design schools acting as magnets for students from all around the world. Along with this there is an increasing demand for T-shaped graduates who are able to address business challenges with a balance of cultural sensitivity, commercial smartness, technical expertise as well as the assumed designer sensitivity. How can this situation be improved?

This paper will describe the “EdMOJO” platform developed by Hong Kong-based international creative agency Asia Digital MOJO. Fundamentally, “EdMOJO” puts agencies to work with design institutes to co-create design education. The agency works with its partner school in marketing, recruiting, curriculum design and teaching, and provides support to students during professional development after graduation. The goal is to ground and guide expat students into the local industry as soon as possible and ensure they are ready to face the competitive workforce immediately upon graduation.

**Keywords: Internationalization, Student Experience, Design Education**

## INTRODUCTION

“Design education begins with learning the uncommon beauty of common things”[1]

The state of design education seems to be evolving at a constant pace over the last few years. We notice this gradual and incremental change governing the industry. Arts head: Neville Brody, president, D&AD in a recent Guardian interview said: “We need to be producing a nation of creative thinkers, not creative objects. It's not about developing clichéd craft; it's about building on an extraordinary legacy, but combining that with our ability to take creative risks. That's what we're supposed to be developing: people who will change and lead in global industries. Not people who will become professional clones. We're not a nation of vocationalists; we're not a factory turning out glazed clay china versions of ourselves.” [2]

It is interesting to note how the industry is viewing designers at the forefront of innovation and business in the rapidly evolving market and hiring these design graduates to be part of the driving workforce.

Traditionally design schools have been viewed as a platform for students passionate about expressing their skills as a means of expressing themselves. Thus failing to equip students and graduates for the real world and commercial demands.

But fortunately the evolution of the design industry, needs of people, cultural environment, economic opportunities and modernization has rapidly changed the state and affairs of design education at a global level bringing the need and importance of design and innovation.

Our world is filled with organizations. Here, we are constantly shifting and adapting to the demands of our environment which is governed by the rapidly changing economic, social and cultural parameters. This constant change requires designers today to be progressive by attitude. Students and design education today are looking beyond fuelling consumerism. In fact, many design schools and students today look at the notion of design as a tool for improvement to bring about a positive social change.

Today design schools play a unique role in satisfying the changing demands of the industry. The need for innovation, self-expression, brand transformation and sustainability brings forth the need for good designers with a sense of not just bringing good design skills and knowledge but also a greater understanding of business dimension, global competition and commitment.

One may have noticed the rise in international design schools and the booming Asian creative industry. The tremendous social economic development in the Asian society today redefines creativity in particular. Consumers today are swiftly adapting to the technological and creative lifestyles. It is interesting to see how products, services and the environment around us today are interacting with one another in this heightened creative standard.

Here it is natural to ask:

**Are today's graduates ready to counter the professional demands of the industry? Are they ready to charge into the competitive global and competitive workforce?**

This brings us to take a peek into the trends and initiatives of design education and industries today.

## DESIGN INDUSTRY AND SCHOOLS: NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Design education today is increasingly becoming an international affair with schools like Parsons, School of Design, Arts Center College of Design and Hong Kong Polytechnic University, School of Design acting as magnets for students all around the world. This internationalization is governed by the industrial demands of graduates being lucrative and adaptive as they step into the competitive workforce.

'Internationalization' is truly governed with the social and cultural spirit of where the educational institute is located and the ease at which students are able to function in this new environment away from their comfort zone. The ability to adapt into this new environment, working effectively

and efficiently is rather a challenge. Students look at this as a positive opportunity to enroll into International schools and universities. However, due to packed curricular and cultural and language barriers many students do not experience the full local flavor of their new home. The dropout rate for Asian students is also one of the highest amongst expat communities [3]. The most common reasons being difficult cultural assimilation and lack of understanding of the local job market.

Two main reasons cited in research are cultural and language differences and poor integration into the commercial *milieu* after graduation due to an insulated existence during study. Many students choose to return to their home country citing uncertainty about working in the local job market. Such a trend clearly challenges the *raison d'être* of overseas study if divorced from local commercial experience.

Students as they enter into a new environment need support to mentally equip themselves for the challenges that lay ahead. While most universities today believe in this exposure for students, it also faces challenges on how far are students able to handle the pressures of this environment.

The need for empathy here is just as urgent. A study by Stephen Trathen, highlights that "If we accept the definition of internationalization as 'A preparation for life in the global community through greater understanding and respect for other cultures' (Curtain University cited in Pearson, 1999), the exposure of students to internationalization must form an integral part of their university experience. This is reflected in the current strategic goals for the University of Canberra, which state that 'The university aims to provide an international experience for its community characterized by reciprocal and responsive understanding, global citizenship and on going learning and improvement.' (University of Canberra, 2004)" [4]

Another crucial aspect to note is the increasing demand by creative industries for T-shaped design graduates who are able to dive into the depth of their core skills and experience in one discipline while being empathetic and having the breadth via skills and experience over other disciplines. Tim Brown of IDEO who introduced this term believed that these designers fostered greater collaboration.

The design industry today is constantly looking for graduates who are able to address business challenges with a balance of cultural sensitivity, commercial smarts, technical expertise as well as design sensitivity. As Hartmut Eslinger, designer and educator, suggests, "it is the lack of business training that makes many designers unfit for work" [5]. Business schools such as the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto and Stanford D-School offer specific "design thinking" courses to MBA students in an attempt humanize their business education. Language familiarity, Cultural understanding of customs and behaviors, commercial connections and professional etiquettes are some of the challenges in the local space faced by graduates.

The trends of internationalization of design education marred by cultural barriers and needed for integrative professionals pose major challenges to employees and design schools. Given this challenge, we question on **how can we expose design students to a curriculum or experience that may impart and make them ready for these industry ideals?**

**How may we encourage students to travel away from home to universities to establish links with not just institutions but also draw close connections with the industry?**

Addressing these questions is what may provide graduates with global opportunities and a holistic experience throughout their academic journey.

## INDUSTRY AND INSTITUTE COOPERATION

Both implementing 'internationalization' and providing for T-shaped designers tap into the opportunities that lie in educational institutions partnering with industry and businesses.

This partnership often yields effective ready graduates to enter the competitive workforce. Additionally it fosters Innovation between schools and businesses.

The purpose of this collaboration paves way to greater learning and understanding of the realistic side of the commercial industry, stronger networking and personal adaptive skills.

While this may have it's own challenges of trust, business complexity and governing models and slowness of change, nevertheless it is believed that this collaboration is rather influential and creates a rather strong foundation for graduates before they charge into the real world.

The Hyper Island philosophy embraces this new world of integrated and constant learning. Instead of following a traditional monologue-based, teacher-to-student methodology, they offer dialogue based, participative programmes. Their philosophy of 'learning by doing' is today making the school thrive on success. The school here is independent by nature, not governed by any national curriculum allowing it to be as flexible and adaptive to the changing needs of the industry. Their flexible responsive courses, taught by working industry professionals, aim at fast-tracking graduates into the world of design.

With the above posed challenges we see the growing need between industry and business with design schools to provide applied learning that seeks to satisfy the demands of a skilled employee.

**In order to cater to these industry demands of internationalization and T-shaped personalities while also taking into consideration the social and cultural challenges that most Asian students face, the paper shall take us through the practice and philosophy of EdMOJO and it's partnerships with several design institutes in South and East Asia, and Europe.**

## EDMOJO – A CO-CREATION PLATFORM

EdMOJO was designed to allow the Asia Digital MOJO network to leverage relationships with Design Schools. The follow interventions were developed with each partner.

1. **Experiential Recruiting and Marketing**: using agency practices, MOJO helps design schools to communicate the study and cultural experience and offers landing services to help students settle in their local environment.

EdMOJO has been working with **The Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Design since 2012**. The School of Design is the top design school in Asia with over 1400 students. Here, we provide courses, sponsored projects, internship placements and student screening.  
[www.sd.polyu.edu.hk](http://www.sd.polyu.edu.hk)

We were actively part of the recruiting and admissions for the (MSc) Multimedia and Technology Entertainment (2014-15) where we screened applicants based on the schools admissions criteria and conducted hundreds of face-to-face and video call interviews with international and local students to help select the qualifying students for the degree.

Apart from helping Hong Kong Polytechnic University on the recruiting we are actively creating a student experience platform for the Elisava School in Europe. In this platform we intend to recruit, screen and assist students moving over seas and also help them in the landing services for to make them feel secure the minute they land in their new home. In this ongoing platform of ours we also intend to help students network with the local companies and help them with internship placements post graduation.

2. **Practice-based curriculum design:** MOJO studies co-author curricula with faculty with a focus on particular community and commercial imperatives. We have been actively collaborating with International schools like IED, Milan and DSK International, Pune, India helping them design their design courses. **For IED** we designed their course: 'Design for Brand Engagement', which was based on practical needs and realms of the industry.

**At DSK International School, Pune India** we helped them design their Interaction design Course, Apart from this we have provided the DSK Design programme with Master classes, Internships, Jury Chairmanship, curriculum design and promote their English language programme in Asia.

3. **Studio-based teaching with industrial partners:** classes are based on live-projects running in the local environment and include site-visits and professional paid internship periods at MOJO and its partners.

In the past 3 years, we have led 4 successful master classes for **DSK International Design School's 3rd year Digital Design** students including

- **Digital Marketing by Design (2013)** - developing new marketing strategy and design for a luxury mobile phone launch.
- **Mindful Design (2014)** – helping students refocus on the creative process and how mindfulness helps to focus on design activity. Introducing meditative and creative games during the design process.
- **Digital Disruption by Design (2014)** – leading designers through the process of disruption and creating new disruptive services of several well-known online brands, and
- **Design-Led Experiential Brand Building (2015)** – teaching students new ways of thinking and approach to brand building.

#### **CASE REVIEW | DSK International School of Design, Pune, India**

*EdMOJO's relationship with DSK stretches back to 2012 where the Head of Studies approached us through an online platform, linked-in. He found Dr. David Williams, by searching for Asia-based design and education professionals and upon reviewing his incredible experience invited him to join the design school's Graduation Jury that year.*

*Upon this successful encounter they further extended their relations with EdMOJO and we were invited to conduct master classes during January 2013 for students studying Digital Experience Design. These Master classes are generally led by industrial leaders with about 12 – 16 students participating.*

*It is a way of engaging students directly with live projects and also keeping in mind open opportunities that lay for them ahead upon graduation. We further participated in other master classes in May 2013 and further were invited to chair the graduation jury in October 2013.*

*With the success of these master classes we continued conducting innovative experience led classes for students in May 2014 and further placed students from ISD as part of International Internship requirements of the school at the AdMOJO Hong Kong in May 2014 and July 2014 respectively.*

*During Nov 2014 we further engaged in discussions with the design faculty to develop their Interaction Design course that would bring voices from academia and design industry. Further in 2014 we again were invited to chair the Graduation Jury for the design school.*

*With this strong bond created over the two years with the school, during May 2015 we further partnered with the school's management to establish and open an experience led design studio which offers opportunities to final year students graduating. We currently have four full time employees, all ex master class students who are actively engaged in International projects. With this we also have our fourth intern student from ISD who is now placed in our Pune Office. We continue to support the school for various activities and also have been invited to be part of the graduation jury this Nov 2015.*

Apart from this EdMOJO is currently also leading a sponsored project in the Design Experience course of (MDes) Design Practices at PolyU, School Of Design. Shangri-La Group of luxury hotels have sponsored this project and moored within the hospitality domain of room experience, spa & wellness and food and beverage.

Along with all this active participation, EdMOJO has also collaborated with Education Institutes like Swedish Institute helping them in Research and Strategy on understanding their student profiles more closely. We are also currently engaged in conducting workshops for them, educating and bringing them closer to understanding China trends and industry.

4. **Continuous professional development**: students are engaged by local offices in fulltime work but continue their relationship with their alma mater through supervising and mentoring of later cohorts.

We have partnered with DSK International Design School and 'School of Design', PolyU to make sure students get real world experience learn from experienced team members and build up their skills as professionals. Our interns are now part of our team in India. We have shared online a video of what some of them had to say about working with us. You can check the video here: [goo.gl/fEtvRI](http://goo.gl/fEtvRI)

For 3 straight years, EDMOJO has been involved with the school and part of the jury for Digital Design Diploma Course. Our role was to chair each student presentation, managing discussion, questions and deliberation. We are proud to say that 2 of our team members in India were among the top student presenters before

## EDMOJO EVALUATION

We are still developing our evaluation plans within the co-creation network of institutes.

We keep a close watch on the progress of each intervention using a range of measures:

- SFQ: student feedback questionnaires, normally part of the institute process
- Intern placement numbers
- Full time offers within the company
- Number of sponsored projects in design institutes

## DISCUSSION AND INTEREST FOR COMMUNITY

- Overcoming suspicion or distrust of university faculty

The bond between students, university and the industry is a crucial one. Higher education heavily depends on the shared trust and governance between the faculty and administration. Today's D schools are adopting co-creation models in order to be in par of industry requirements. Shared governance is one way of tackling distrust. How else could we look at strengthening the bond between faculty members, students and the university?

- Matching commercial and academic needs

The intention of this co-creation model is to effectively deliver both learning goals.

A. Academic goals towards design methods, process and teaching

B. Industrial and practical know-hows to develop goal setting and self-awareness among students In order to do so, both Institutes and industry depend on each other. The discussion lies on how far does this co-operation go in order to enrich the student experience at a holistic level?

- Managing intellectual property

In order to smoothly function within this ecosystem proposed above, this is one of the key areas of discussion. Student projects are often yielding fresh perspectives and ideas that could be brought to life with the joint efforts and relationship between schools and industry partners. Having a NDA (Non- disclosure agreement) is one way to look at managing intellectual property and legalities. What are the other means to collaborate and manage intellectual property and the challenges faced in doing so?

- Adopting a D-school model

There has been a fundamental reconsideration in the manner we approach challenges within organizations today. There is a need for innovating the way we approach industry challenges. Design graduates today are challenged to understand the business dimension

in order to function practically within Innovation realms and vice versa Business graduates are expected to adopt design thinking as a means to break the monotony. We at EdMOJO also are developing this with design institutes while formulating their curriculum design. How do we feel about this recent development and how may we measure the success of hiring these new graduates with this edge?

## CONCLUSION

The EdMOJO platform has been developed in close collaboration with several design institutes collocated with MOJO design studios.

Our Platform is an inter relationship shared with Design schools and the industry. Our credentials above describe how we at EdMOJO implement 'Internationalization' into design schools and also cultivate and mentor towards producing T-shaped graduates prepared for the real world.

The benefit of this co-partnership goes a long way. It promotes cultural diversity, international knowledge, culture assimilation and deep-rooted relationship with industries.

It completes the academic experience in its fullest sense exposing and challenging them, but building great opportunities to be global designers. Graduates are more informed and lucrative by the end of their journey making them a great fit in the industry.

EdMOJO seeks to be a transforming catalyst in their academic pursuits for students. We are widening our EDMOJO platform to cover government-funded design institutes in Mexico and India.

We will continue to measure and report on these findings.

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