

Designer and Visiting Fellow in the Department of Design and Technology, Loughborough University

Michael Rodber, Visiting Fellow, Department of Design and Technology, October 2008

How a designer spends 1 day a week in the Department of Design and Technology delivering a module with around 90 second year undergraduate students.

Reasons for engagement

Michael's motivation to become involved with teaching was that he could see that there were a lot of things changing in the world of design. *"I felt it would be quite nice to take some time out from my normal work to go on a voyage of exploration myself in terms of where design was going and using the University environment to explore that. That was my motivation where is the world going and where should design go with it and that very much set the tone for everything I have done really."*

After working in the department for over a year he investigated studying for a PhD in design research. *"The department did agree to this but in fact what was interesting was that when I actually sat down to do the research itself I realised that it was going to be far too demanding for the amount of time that I could put in and I felt, and the department also agreed, that perhaps that wasn't really the best way for me to spend my time."*

The engagement

One of the things Michael had in mind was the amount of work companies do before the traditional design brief particularly in terms of those activities

that go ahead of a design brief. *"The design process is just a small part of a much bigger process of new product development. I came across this in Jones Garrard working with companies like Proctor and Gamble where they did a lot of work in to consumer understanding to try and identify what products consumers wanted."*

Michael and his colleague Paul Wormald developed the New Product Development module which is about understanding consumers, understanding the brand and understanding the business context. *"By designers understanding some of these things perhaps make them a more broadly thinking designer and better equip them to be more effective. So we have been developing that, essentially it started off as an optional module and now is a compulsory module for 2nd year BA students and has been developing from strength to strength."*

Michael and Paul plan to bring the New Product Development module in to MA level and then to set up a complete MA programme in this aspect of study so it will be a self standing qualification which will be a mixture of design, business studies and management.

Issues

Michael feels frustrated that he is not involved in the strategy and the regular tactics of the University and believes that this is partly because he only comes in on 1 day a week so doesn't get involved in staff meetings which he would like to.

"I still feel a fairly isolated pocket and every now and then we try to branch out of that but it doesn't quite work really. It's probably a bit on both sides I suppose it's the difference between stuff that you can do and take on and just get on with and the stuff you have to stand back and think about with other people and in some ways it is easier to go away and do it rather than spending more time looking at the bigger picture thinking strategically."

Benefits

Michael does try and have the discipline of spending one day a week in the department, which is usually a Monday, and people get used to him being here on that day.

Currently the New Product Development module is aimed at those who have studied a product design or industrial design undergraduate programme and want to study at a more advanced level.

Ultimately the goal will be when it is a self standing programme which would attract not just designers but also marketing people and it will be about new product development not just about product design, product design will be a component within new product development.

"In new product development it's very much a fusion of lots of different disciplines and understanding how all these disciplines come together and what they contribute and how you can manage those multidisciplinary activities to create successful new product development."

Unintended outcomes

Michael finds working with the students is always fascinating. *"Working with young*

people and actually seeing where they are coming from and how different they are from when I was a student, their motives are different and it is obviously interesting to know where they are coming from and what motivates them."

Reflections

"When they are in the students probably wonder what it's all about sometimes particularly something like this module which is a bit different from what they are used to and I think it's a bit hard for them. They probably find it a little bit confusing or a bit difficult and I think with some people you feel it perhaps goes over their head, it's not what they expected but we do get feedback from some people that go out there and realise what it is all about and its probably only then that they fully appreciate it."

Context

Michael Rodber is a designer who has worked in the industry for over 35 years and is a Director of Jones Garrard Move. He studied Transport design at Lanchester Polytechnic (now Coventry University) and after 3 years of study graduated in 1974 with a Polytechnic certificate. At that time this was a new course about transport which appealed to him and the only similar course around was the Royal College of Art car styling course. During the course he completed a 6 month placement with Ford Motor Company in Essex.

"The first job I got I was made redundant from after about a month and it was actually during the period when the 3 day week had just ended and there was a lot of disruption, trying to get a job was very difficult so my introduction to industry wasn't particularly good, this was in the mid-1970's. I went in to the car industry for about four and a half years in car design and then joined Jones Garrard and set up a transport sector within that company. We did a lot of work mainly in trains and planes and then in the

early 2000's we split and I hived off the transport side and set up this new company Jones Garrard Move purely to focus on the transport sector."

Jones Garrard Move
www.jonesgarrardmove.com

