AWARD AS A DESIGN METRIC: VALUE AND MEANING

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ABSTRACT

Selecting award winner companies as research sample is frequent in Design Management studies (Guo, 2010; Borja de Mozota, 2003; Desbarats 2006), especially those developed in North America and Europe. The assumption underlining this research option is clear: when a designer or a team of Design wins a prize its processes are supposed to be exemplary. This aspect is more clearly seen in international market. However, in other countries, especially in Latin America, is not easy to keep this pattern of samples for Design Management researches. Dutra (2014) notes that large Brazilian companies, when questioned about their design management practices, mention to have no interest in competing or getting awards in design. This finding raises some issues, like: (a) what is the real value of design prizes? (b) how interesting for research is to focus solely in winning companies? and (c) which kind of information regarding Design Management could researchers lose when non-winning companies don't take part of the samples? This paper focus on those issues, analyzing them through a qualitative research based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with company's design teams. Performed in Brazilian companies, the research presents well-established Design Management processes. The results indicate the need of discussion regarding the concept and value of awards in general. Finally, this paper also discusses the implications for design management research on disconsidering not awarded companies as research samples; and the gaps uncovered by this practice.

Keywords: Design Management, Award, Value

1 INTRODUCTION

The preference for using award-winning companies as samples for research is evident in current design management studies (Guo, 2010; Borja de Mozota, 2003; Desbarats 2006), especially those developed in North America and Europe. The assumption that underlies this research preference is clear: When a designer or a design team wins a prize, it provides their firms with recognition for excellence in the design of their products, which leads to more accurate observations on topics related to design management. Design prizes reflect a higher level of development in design. The achievement of a prize by a designer or a design team may provide an increase of a product's value to consumers and stakeholders, a response that is more clearly seen in international the market, to whom an award indicates excellence in design processes and reflects that the product is the best option.

According to Guo (2010), one of the ways to assess the activity of design excellence is through prizes. Thus, the author identifies the award as a design metric. In view of this, the more premium the company gains, the more it will be considered exemplary in practice and in design and thus will be viewed as the best design offered by that company. In addition to Guo (2010), other authors

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who conduct their research in design management, such as Borja de Mozota (2003), show the results of research that use as a sample companies that have won awards in design competitions.

A theoretical review, however brief, states that an award in design, primarily in Europe, is an important metric for this activity and informs what type of service or product the company has to offer. Borja de Mozota (2003) and Guo (2010) display search results with a sample of award-winning companies, showing that awards are important indicators.

However, in other countries, particularly in Latin America, is not easy to keep this pattern of samples for design management research. Although there are many award-winning firms, recognised even in the international market, these firms do not recognise the prize as indicating excellence. Dutra and Wolff (2014) observed that most big Brazilian companies are not interested in competitions for design awards, and the motivation to participate in these types of competition does not have a place in their practices of design management. This finding leads to some issues, such as: (a) What is the real value of design prizes; (b) how interesting is it to focus only on winning companies for research; and (c) what type of information regarding design management could researchers lose when non-winning companies are excluded from the samples?

This paper focuses on these three issues, which were analysed through a qualitative study based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with these companies' design teams and strategic professionals.

2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Following Dutra and Wolff's (2014) research on metrics and prizes, this research seeks to further explore what designers think about prizes and the metrics they represent. Qualitative research was operationalized through in-depth interviews with respondents using a survey in the working environment of respondents, leading to the establishment of the link with the theme researched and allowing the respondents freedom to express their points of view. According to Kvale (1996), in-depth interviews are valuable for providing direct access to respondents' perceptions and help in the construction of knowledge.

When gathering the opinions of designers regarding awards, it is important to consider the Brazilian and industrial environment of the respondents' professions. Thus, this research considered design teams within large companies. As a counterpoint for these points of view, the opinions of two management professionals, involved with the team and with the strategic perspective, were sought.

Thus, the sample is classified as a convenient sample and a judgment sample. The criteria used include the levelling of sales and the number of employees. According to data from BNDES—Brazilian National Bank for Development—they are large companies.

Five professionals who coordinate or take part in the design teams of the companies were interviewed to learn the team's perspective on the qualifications for receiving an award in design, how awards are perceived and what

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importance they have. A chief designer and a manager of metrics were also interviewed to compare the perception of the team with regarding the same aspects.

Data were collected through the use of a semi-structured survey instrument. The survey instrument used was developed considering the theoretical issues drawn from a literature review. The last stage of research was analysing the data collected from interviews in the companies that were conducted according to Bardin (1977), with regard to content analysis, and generating the categories of analysis that follow.

3 SAMPLE COMPOSITION

Seven professionals, belonging to a group of employees from six large companies, were interviewed. Five are part of the design teams, and two are design managers: One is a design director, and one is responsible for metrics at the company. Each of them shared their points of view on the questions regarding the awards. The profiles of the companies, according to BNDES, are shown in Table 1.

COMPANY	INTERVIEWD POSITION	# OF PEOPLE IN THE DESIGN TEAM	COMPANY SIZE (BNDES)
A	Design Manager	3	Large
B	Design Coordinator	200	Large
	Design Chief		
C	Design Coordinator	4	Large
D	Design Chief	4	Large
E	Design Coordinator	4	Large
F	Metrics' Manager	50	Large

Table 1 – Companies' Profiles

Company A is a family business that belongs to a large group in the segment of domestic utilities. Each company in this group works with its own design department. Company A's design department is subordinated to the marketing department, and it is divided into three large groups: design and innovation, product management and market strategy. Each of the groups has its own working patterns, primarily due to its market segment and product type. The interviewee said they do not invest in research or in media for product disclosure.

According to the interviewee, the market leadership achieved several years ago left them in a comfortable position, which made them become more reactive than innovative. Nevertheless, the interviewee sees design as the only way to achieve differentiation from other competitors.

Company B is the world leader in fashion products. The design department has approximately 200 employees. The design director participates in every important decision along with other professionals at the top of the organisation. According to the interviewee, design is considered the company's core business, which differentiates it from other competitors. The company has an established hierarchy for all employees. The design team is multidisciplinary, and it is segmented by product lines.

Company C is part of a family business group in the segment of thermal utilities. It is subordinated to a single board that now consists of an advisory board composed of family members, which, in the future, should be replaced by a CEO. However, each unit has its own management and engineering, and areas such as IT (Information Technology) and HR (Human Resources) are central. The current organisational chart also has a coordinating unit, and just below it are the areas' coordinators: engineering, factory and trading at the same level. The product engineering coordinator is also responsible for marketing and technical assistance. Under his direction are product development, portfolio management, trading, product improvement and customer service.

Company D is also a large family business, and its main segments are tools, pots and kitchen items. It has a total of ten plants working with an external design team. The design team reports to the trading and engineering directors, who represent the highest level, in factory units, of the hierarchy. The designer focus is the development of new products and their packaging.

Company E is more than 50 years old and operates in the segment of thermal products. The professional interviewed said the company has always been involved with design issues, and nothing is created or launched into the market without some aspect of innovation. In the opinion of the interviewee, the brand inspires confidence and product quality. To define his position in the company, the designer presents himself as the product development coordinator. Company E's hierarchy is not formally established.

Finally, Company F represents brands of consumer durables, such as refrigerators, stoves and appliances, through assembling, manufacturing and importing those products. It is the world leader and the largest manufacturer in its market segment, and it is well-defined across the different departments and areas of the company hierarchy.

4 PROCESS AND PRIZES TO DESIGNERS

Regarding the distinctive design competitions, according to Desbarats (2006), the Design Effectiveness Awards (DBA), the British award that analyses numbers and arguments and not images, is highly valued by the British. The bank examiners of this contest consists of not only designers but other professionals who analyse the effectiveness of design in companies, based on criteria such as cause and effect and clarity of results, seeking the financial return given by the design team to the company. According to the author, companies that have succeeded in this contest in the last decade can offer useful insights about how design works in a business context.

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According to the qualitative research, among the respondents, there is a strong tendency to explain the design process, from which come the demands for the design team, how they are interpreted, the search for references, and the first concepts and designs. When it is possible, they proceed with prototyping and other tests, which are also the departments and areas involved, and ultimately the satisfaction of developing a product that is well received by consumers and provides financial income through sales. However, it is not mentioned whether these design teams have questions for the management departments regarding the goals of the company, and it is not clear what types of information the design team receives to clarify whether the design team provides an increase of sales.

An apparent discomfort appears in response to questions about measurement and performance indicators. The designers feel unable to address these matters because they do not know exactly who is in charge of this information, and so few believe they should be interested in such matters that are the responsibility of other work teams and other professionals.

Regarding the awards and contests, specifically, there is a lack of interest among designers. The reasons they do not keep their focus on winning awards is because of their options and the organisational culture; furthermore, there are high costs of participating and complying with the contests requirements, and they feel the types of awards have value and meaning only for designers.

5 DESIGN PERCEPTIONS ON PRIZES AND RECOGNITION

According to the respondents of companies A, B, C, D and E, there is little investment in these companies to compete for prizes in design. Although the majority have already won awards, the reasons for not making new investments range from not believing it is possible to have an important innovation to present in their products, or the company does not work with the culture of innovation, or the company sponsoring the event is not accredited.

A point made by one respondent raises the following question: For whom is the design award important—the designers or the company? Beyond that point, it was also mentioned that the companies did not increase their sales after winning the award, nor were they contacted by new clients. There is an understanding among professionals that an award in design aims to provide an increase in sales for the company through their work, but this does not occur through the awards.

Another point mentioned relates to the high costs of participating in the competitions, which, in the opinion of the respondents, make demands, sometimes beyond what would be required, thus leading to a large investment of financial resources and time for the company and professionals to meet the requirements.

Finally, an issue that affects firms' decision to participate or not participate in contests is how to disseminate these awards. Because companies do not have the culture of encouraging participation in contests and do not disclose the conquest, the interested public is not aware of the award or what it means for that market segment.

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However, among the interviewed companies, there is one that believes in the value of awards granted by the company. This company has won numerous awards for product design, for which constant investments are made. The company values the awards won and uses the awards in design as a business card, primarily for the international market.

6 DESIGN MANAGERS' PERCEPTIONS AND RECOGNITION

To establish a link between the designers' understanding of awards and the results of awards with the managers of these companies, we sought to learn the perceptions of professionals engaged in strategic areas of these companies and the way management monitors this question.

Thus, two other professionals were interviewed. In Company B, the design director was interviewed. According to this director, design is nothing more than a simple collaboration tool of the destruction of impossibilities because innovation is a collective implementation of ideas that have a surprising result. This director emphasise the importance of the group; nothing is done alone. Design requires a systemic view. With regard to participation in design contests and the award itself, in his opinion, it is not in the company's culture, and it is not the reason why the company works; it is a consequence of good work together.

However, the company where he works has already won several awards and continues to participate in contests, answering the calls of the organisers of the events. In his opinion, the biggest prize is to realise in the streets the intense use of the company's products and the large number of satisfied customers, who are aware of designers who they once did not know existed through the democratised access to information. On the contrary, a bank examiner of a contest would assess the company's processes, the product itself and its features but would not actually use it, to be sure how good the product is and its effect on its consumers. Regardless of the brand, a consumer must first fall in love with the product and then perceive the brand. Actually, the project comes first, then comes the signature, and then comes the prize. However, some products have become irreplaceable, and somehow, design icons were never awarded.

One point mentioned earlier by designers and is again mentioned is the issue of the requirements of the competitions. The respondents said it is certainly interesting to win awards, but it is necessary to consider the cost and hard work required by the rules of the contest. According to the director, design departments need to work to generate income for the company, so they have little time to devote to meeting the requirements of invitations to tender. "What is the reason for winning a prize if it does not provide wealth for the company, smiles for consumers and stays there; it does not sell."

In the opinions of the respondents, the outcomes for the companies are sales and accessibility. This is a real award. In his perception, among the design team, they are more concerned with their own rewards and in achieving their own targets of practice. An award can even generate competition between designers regarding who is the most decorated, and it can become a more important goal than making a good product. Nonetheless, in his opinion, perhaps designers who

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are in need of a prize, which manages recognition, are precisely those who are isolating themselves.

In Company F, the professional interviewed operates in the metrics department of the company, and according to him, the company has no tradition of award. Until 2010, the company had no record of winning awards, but that does not mean that they did not have a good development or design process then, even if it was different than it is now.

There are interest and effort within design teams to participate in the competitions, in which the management does not interfere. Awards, in the opinion of the respondents, generate recognition in field of design as a profession. However, being an award-winner does not mean having the best process and the best product; rather, it reflects who followed the contest rules and who was judged positively by a bank examiner. The design teams feel recognised for their effort when they win a prize in the area, but that does not mean that other products are ineffective or that they do not meet consumer expectations.

In the respondents' opinions, the most important metric still refers to sales of units; thus, it is understood that an award-winning product that does not sell does not meet the company's expectations. Therefore, we cannot say that winning an award leads to higher sales of the product or to a greater number of customers.

For the respondents, questions remain: What is a good design? A beautiful product? A functional product? The respondents believe it depends on what a design was created for and what it is proposed to be. It could be a room ornament, or it could be used for a specific purpose. The requirements for awards are determined by a promoter that defines a bank examiner and objective criteria. Thus, some questions arise, such as: Are the demands of examining board demands clear? Do the rules go beyond the actual requirements for an adequate trial? Are participants aware of the process?

For the interviewee, an award does not serve as a metric. They believe an award reflects not the perception and functionality for those who actually consume that product but the opinion of a panel or an event promoter. Their opinion may not be seen as a decisive factor to proceed with the production, assembly and importing of any product the fact that has won an award.

7 **CONCLUSIONS**

According to the primarily European, international literature, prizes are configured as a design metric (Guo, 2010; Borja Mozota, 2003; Desbarats. 2006). However, this perception is not shared by Brazilian companies, and this is noted through interviews with designers in companies, design directors and metrics professionals who do not view the award as a metric. For these respondents, the award, to be considered a metric, should provide an increase in revenue and customer satisfaction because the metric is selling to businesses. For most of the professionals interviewed, the value of a design prize is more important to designers than to the companies because they do not provide a real increase in sales.

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Winning the award must give the company or professional an exemplary status in the development of the activity in which it engages. However, companies in Brazil show a different understanding about awards, and the reasons for their opinions are several. Among these companies, the motivation to pursue the awards is influenced by the importance of the award and for whom it is important, the high cost of participation and the fact that it does not interfere with the company's revenues. These reasons lead to disincentives to participate in new contests and become perceived as expensive and as not providing much return.

Another issue to consider regarding awards is the communication about them. Both internal and external communication are important. Does the company have the culture to value the awards and make it a great achievement that is worthy to be shared and deservedly valued? Table 2 shows a comparison between literature and reality in companies.

LITERATURE	DESIGNERS IN THE DESIGN TEAM
Great and growing interest to reach the most adequate form to measure design results for companies	Designers unware of companies' goals and no specific metrics for design activities
Design integrates companies activities	Most of the companies do not have design representation at a strategic level
The importance of the elucidation of a design manager's role	Assumption of "tasks executors". No interest from designers to leave their work station to learn more about the company as a whole
The search for isolation of the design activity to find its contributions to the companies' results	Most designers understand sales as the unique indicator of design results

Table 2 – Literature x Designers in Companies

Thus, there is no endorsement of the literature by the reality of Brazilian companies, and the fact that companies are awarded as exemplary is questioned because if there is no interest in participating in the awards, we cannot say that the company did not develop a good product or did not have a development process that generated well-established and positive results for the company. Therefore, using only awarded companies as samples for research can lead to mistakes; for instance, researchers lose track of how companies with product development and consistent processes address design management.

This article covered a sample of large Brazilian BNDES companies. It is suggested that this sample, for future work, be enhanced with a greater number of respondents to be able to analyse both qualitatively and quantitatively the perceived outcomes, beyond the firms' attempts to value the importance of the

activity of design metrics. Additionally, the perceptions of international companies regarding awards as design metrics could be further researched as a way to compare results.

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