

A Business Model for Communication Design Enterprises

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Several international reports and studies indicate that the Communication Design sector has a skill deficit in entrepreneurship and business management, and a greater understanding of these topics is needed. Some authors advocate applying existing business models for design enterprises. However, the skill deficit prevails. It is worth noting that these reports discuss the entrepreneurship deficit in general terms without an explanation of the causes of this deficit or how to remedy the issue. Therefore, this paper explores the development of a Business Model specific for Design Entrepreneurs for deployment in Communication Design enterprises. A theoretical framework for a specific business model for design entrepreneurs for application in their enterprises was developed by assessing the literature in the field, in which a previously unidentified connection between the themes of design and the entrepreneurship process was identified. This review evaluated themes for their applicability in a business model for design enterprises. This hypothesis was tested and evaluated through this study's primary phenomenological research, conducted through semi-structured interviews with prominent and successful design entrepreneurs. Thematic analysis methods guided the research findings. The data analysis identified various themes that emerged from interviews. These themes helped further develop the theoretical framework and iterate a proposed entrepreneurship model applicable to design entrepreneurs. This proposed entrepreneurship model better explains the entrepreneurship process from the point of view of designers, meaning that the model is relevant and valuable to the sector. This paper contributes to the academic knowledge of entrepreneurship by developing a framework for a business model, specifically for design entrepreneurs in the Communication Design sector. In addition, it proposes a thematic relationship between entrepreneurship and design processes, a connection that has not been explored in the literature before. This

novel perspective enriches the academic discourse on entrepreneurship and design, offering new avenues for research and understanding.

Key words: Business model, Creative Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship process

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is vital for economic development, and its understanding has evolved with societal and theoretical changes (Murphy et al., 2006). However, there is a significant skills deficit in entrepreneurship and business processes in the Communication Design sector internationally (Design Enterprise Skillnet, 2021; Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2016; Intertrade Ireland, 2009; Design Council, 2007) and a need for enhanced entrepreneurship training (Government of Ireland, 2024; European Union, 2019). Despite these findings, the skills deficit must be meaningfully addressed, with no significant improvement noted.

The literature on entrepreneurship largely overlooks the design sector, particularly Communication Design (Kennedy, 2023). Existing models (Blundel et al., 2021; Grassman et al., 2014; Ries, 2011; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; Martin, 2009; Sarasvathy et al., 2003; Jackson et al., 2001; O'Kane, 2001) do not specifically address the needs of

design enterprises. The literature suggests applying these models to Communication Design (Preddy, 2011), but this has not improved competencies (Kennedy, 2023), leaving the entrepreneurship process in the sector undefined. This study investigates contemporary models and their application in Communication Design enterprises.

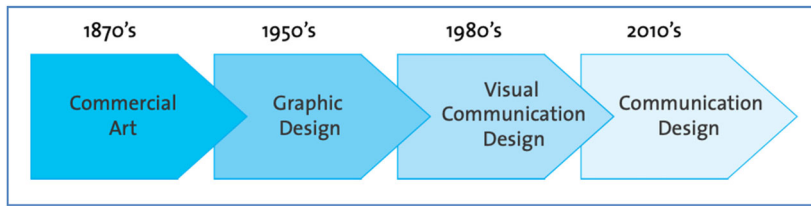
Defining Communication Design

Various authors attempted to define *Communication Design*, resulting in ongoing and unresolved debate. While literature often conflates art and design, they are distinct. Heller (2008) noted that the difference is in the client-driven nature of design, a view supported by Plazm (2003), and Communication Design enterprises operate in a commercial business paradigm (Kennedy, 2023).

Graphic Design originated in the Victorian Era (McDermott, 2007), with the term being first used in 1922 (Newark, 2002); previously, designers were known as *Commercial Artists* (Spark, 2013). In education, the term *Visual Communication Design* is more

prevalent (School of Visual Arts, 2023; TU Dublin, 2023; Ravensbourne University of London, 2009). Some consider *Graphic Design* and *Visual Communication Design* interchangeable (Shillington, 2023; GDC, 2021; Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2017; Institute of Designers in Ireland, 2008). However, ICOGRADA (2014) and McDermott (2007) advocate for the term *Communication Design* due to its use of visual language, its ability to address modern needs, and its coverage of both print (brand identity, packaging, wayfinding, information graphics) and digital design (web, interface, interaction) (TU Dublin, 2022a; Ravensbourne University of London, 2009), making it a more comprehensive and relevant term.

Figure 1 illustrates the various historical and modern descriptions of the discipline. The terms used have changed as they reflect cultural, societal, technological, and economic changes and increased demands on what the discipline is expected to provide for clients. Therefore, the newer term, *Communication Design*, is adopted for this paper. However, it is worth noting that the literature does



Source: Author, adapted from the literature.

Figure 1. Historical Usages of Terms to Describe the Discipline. Source: Author, adapted from the literature. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

not discuss Communication Design within the context of Entrepreneurship; equally, Entrepreneurship is rarely discussed within the literature on design (Kennedy, 2023). Nevertheless, when entrepreneurship is discussed, it is typically within a discussion on *Design Thinking* for organisational transformation (Naiman, 2019; Brown, 2008) or design-led entrepreneurship for other types of enterprises (García, 2014) and not within the lens of designers utilising entrepreneurial thinking in forming and running their design enterprises.

Communication Design as Small Enterprises

Communication Design enterprises are typically owner-run, small businesses (Kennedy, 2023; Intertrade Ireland, 2009; Design Council, 2005; Design Council & DBA, 2005). Notably, 81% have fewer than ten employees (Kennedy, 2023), and the European Commission (2015, 2003) classified these as Micro-Enterprises. Small design enterprises are common worldwide (Kennedy, 2023; United Nations Conference of Trade and Development, 2022; European

Commission, 2009) and often have limited resources, affecting strategy implementation, business growth, staff roles, internal capabilities, and entrepreneurship competencies.

Figure 2 illustrates the number of employees within design enterprises, which indicates that the Communication Design sector predominantly comprises micro-enterprises (Intertrade Ireland, 2009), and this reflects the global sector norms (United Nations Conference of Trade and Development, 2022; The European Commission, 2009).

Entrepreneurship Deficit in Communication Design

Designers, not business people, are the ones who establish design enterprises. Their focus is primarily on design and creativity, often at the expense of developing entrepreneurship skills (Kennedy, 2023). This imbalance in skillset, with designers being more adept in design than in business, could be a key factor contributing to the skill deficit. A designer who starts a business becomes a design entrepreneur, requiring competencies to grow and sustain the enterprise (Kennedy, 2023).

The literature indicates a need for entrepreneurship skills in the Communication Design sector (Design Enterprise Skillnet, 2021; Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2016; Intertrade Ireland, 2009; Design Council, 2007). Despite this, many design enterprises have operated

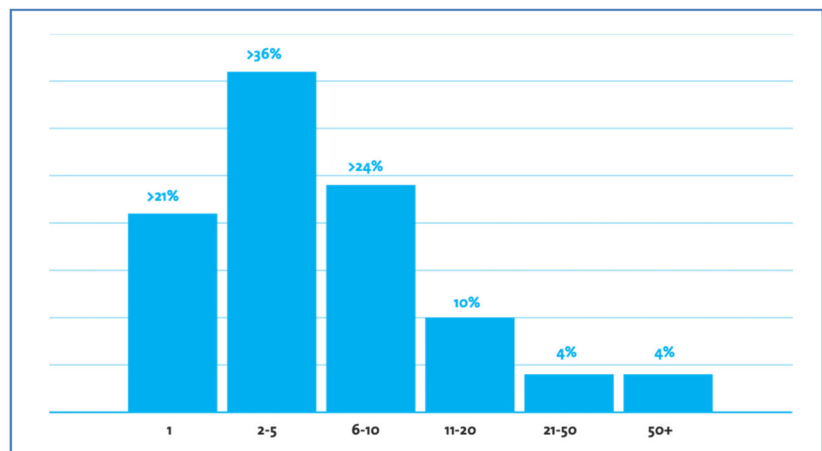


Figure 2. Size of Design Enterprises by Number of Employees. Source: Intertrade Ireland (2009) *A Study of the Design Services Sector on the Island of Ireland*. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

successfully for years, suggesting reasonable entrepreneurship competencies exist. However, Kennedy (2023) posits that design entrepreneurs may interpret the entrepreneurship process differently, implying that current models are less relevant to design entrepreneurs.

Defining Entrepreneurship

The literature presents various viewpoints on entrepreneurship (Lowe & Marriott, 2007). Some emphasise economic contribution, others on innovation, and some focus on risk-taking (Deakins & Freel, 2003). Blundel et al. (2021) define entrepreneurship as involving complex social interactions beyond individuals, encompassing teams, organisations, and networks, and it often relates to new ventures. However, it can occur throughout an organisation's life. Ries (2011a) and Venkataraman (1997) highlight the importance of building an organisation and discovering future goods and services. George and Bock (2012) see entrepreneurship as starting small and growing enterprises. Academic literature often describes entrepreneurship in isolated concepts but frequently lies outside these constraints (Kennedy, 2003). Entrepreneur typically refers to new enterprise founders, excluding those who acquire businesses (Gartner, 1985).

The literature indicated various difficulties in defining entrepreneurship. However, there are

common themes identified within the literature, which include:

- Forming and running a new business;
- That business must be developed for growth, profit and gain;
- Knowledge of a particular business area;
- A propensity to take risks;
- Being multi-skilled.

Therefore, *Entrepreneurship* is a process in which entrepreneurs (an individual or group) develop or manage a business. The business is created to meet and exploit an identified customer demand (needs and wants) while operating in a commercial environment for profit. However, Kennedy (2023) argued that traditional literature fails to identify or discuss entrepreneurship themes pertinent to designers as entrepreneurs and suggests that this represents a bias in the literature as it ignores the designer as an entrepreneur. Nevertheless, the creative sector is crucial to economic development (United Nations Conference of Trade and Development, 2022; Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2016), meaning that design enterprises play a crucial economic and cultural role.

Business Models

The concept of a *Business Model* originated in the 1950s (Kennedy, 2023), and Lewis (2014) noted that while a *Business Model* is recognisable, it is challenging to

define. Ovans (2015) argued that its definition depends on entrepreneurial use, suggesting its application is unique to each business. Peter Drucker (1994) introduced the *Business Model* without defining it (Ovans, 2015). A *Business Model* outlines key assumptions and shows how a business generates revenue and profit (Blundel et al., 2021). Drucker's model included market assumptions, customer and competitor identification, enterprise values, and strengths and weaknesses assessment. Clark (2012) stated that a Business Model logically sustains an organisation financially, emphasising that it is crucial for entrepreneurial success. Johnson et al. (2008) stated that many successful Business Models include:

- A customer value proposition that fulfils an essential job for the customer in a better way than competitors currently do;
- A profit formula that explains how the business will generate revenue in delivering the value proposition;
- Vital resources are required to run the business, and critical processes are required to deliver that value proposition.

Johnson (2010) identified nineteen Business Models (see Table I) and highlighted their subtle differences. However, he did not suggest or discuss a business model for design enterprises (Kennedy, 2023). Similarly, Grassman et al. (2014) identified 55 business models but also omitted to

TABLE I Johnson's List of Business Models.

Analogy	How it Works	Example
Affinity Club	Pay Royalties to some large organisation for the right to sell your product exclusively to their customers	MBNA
Brokerage	Bring together buyers and sellers, charging a fee per transaction to one to another party	Century 21 / Orbitz
Bundling	Package related goods and services together	Fast Food value meals / iPod and iTunes
Cell Phone	Charge different rates for different levels of a service	Sprint / Better Place
Crowdsourcing	Get a large group of people to contribute content for agree in exchange for access to other people's content	Wikipedia / Youtube
Disintermediation	Sell direct, sidestepping traditional middlemen	Dell / Web MD
Fractionalization	Sell partial us of something	NetJets / Time-Shares
Freemium	Offer basic services for free, charge for premium service	Linked-In
Leasing	Rent, rather than sell, high-margin, high-priced products	Cars / MachineryLink
Low-Touch	Lower prices by decreasing service	Walmart / IKEA
Negative Operating Cycle	Lower prices by receiving payment before delivering the offering	Amazon
Pay as you go	Charge for an actual metered usage	Electric Companies
Razor/Blades	Offer the high-margin razor below cost to increase volume sales of low-margin blades	Printers and Ink
Reverse Razor/Blades	Offer the low-margin item below cost to encourage sales of high-margin companion product	Kindle / iPod and iTunes
Reverse Auction	Set a ceiling price and have participants bid as the price drops	E lance.com
Products to Service	Rather than sell a product sell the service the product performs	Zip Car
Standardisation	Standardise a previously personalised service at a lower cost	MinuteClinic
Subscription	Charge a subscription fee to gain access to a service	Netflix
User Communities	Grant membership access to a network, charging both membership fees and advertising	Angie's List

Source: Johnson, M. (2010) *Seizing the White Space: Business Model Innovation for Growth and Renewal*.

discuss a model for design enterprises.

The absence of discussion of a design-specific *Business Model* again suggests a gap in the literature concerning design enterprises; it also suggests that authors discussing entrepreneurship ignore design. Despite the existence of design enterprises, they are not viewed as

entrepreneurial output. Design enterprises are run by design entrepreneurs who conduct business within a commercial market for financial gain through profitability by creating a sustainable design business. A continued entrepreneurship skills deficit in the design sector is well documented (Kennedy, 2023); thus, developing a

specific model for Communication Design enterprises may be necessary to resolve the identified skill deficit.

Applicability of Current Entrepreneurship theory and Business Models in Communication Design

Various theories and approaches to entrepreneurship exist, and these

approaches define or explain the prevalent understanding of entrepreneurship at the time. An assessment of the literature indicated that some entrepreneurship approaches seem relevant for Communication Design enterprises:

- The often-cited *Business Plan* (Blundel et al. (2021)) are a tool entrepreneurs can use regardless of their industry.
- Sarasvathy's *Effectuation* is a means-end framework that correlates with some aspects of the design process, such as the locus of control and supplier relationships.
- Osterwalder's (2004) *Business Model Canvas* is a visual framework where entrepreneurs prototype their business offerings. As a visual tool, it would seem to be something a visual industry may use.
- Ries's (2011a) *Lean Start-Up* has similar aspects to the design process in which solutions are iterated and refined through a continual feedback loop.

Business Plan. According to Entrepreneur Magazine (2022), a Business Plan is a document that outlines the nature of an enterprise, including its sales and marketing strategy and financial background. A business Plan typically includes goals, market analysis, and financial forecasts, all of which are crucial in establishing the viability and market success (Blundel et al., 2021; O'Kane, 2001; Airey, 2013; O'Hara, 2011).

Foote (2002) stressed the importance of quality thought and focused goal-setting in preparing a solid business plan. Effective plans track business direction and reduce risks by projecting future operations (Airey, 2013; O'Gorman & Cunningham, 2007). However, challenges like market size estimation and inaccurate assumptions exist (O'Gorman & Cunningham, 2007). Entrepreneurs are best suited to author their plans, yet some outsource due to perceived skill deficits (Kennedy, 2023). External consultants may not understand the entrepreneur's business, making business planning the entrepreneur's responsibility (O'Gorman & Cunningham, 2007; O'Kane, 2001). However, few design enterprises engage in meaningful business planning and lack the necessary skills (Foote, 2002; Heller, 2008).

Effectuation. *Effectuation* is a sequence of non-predictive, means-driven strategies entrepreneurs can use in problem-solving. *Effectuation* isolates, identifies, and exploits techniques that aim to control the future without having to predict it (Sarasvathy et al., 2003). It requires synthesis and imagination to create new markets that do not exist (Harrison & Leitch, 2008). Therefore, *Effectuation* is a belief that the future is neither found nor predicted.

Blundel et al. (2021) suggested that some entrepreneurs adopt an improvised approach rather than a

detailed analysis of the situation and select the best option. With *Effectuation*, there is an emphasis on questioning what could be achieved, given means and imagined ends (Sarasvathy, 2001); therefore, entrepreneurs deploy effectual analysis and work with existing resources without limiting future possibilities. *Effectuation* focuses on the controllable aspects of an unpredictable future (Harrison & Leitch, 2008). *Effectuation* focuses on future possibilities or realities.

Five fundamental principles that define *Effectuation* (Society for Effectual Action, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2011) are:

- **The Bird in Hand Principle (Means):** Entrepreneurs start with what they have while looking at who they are, what is known and whom they know;
- **The Affordable Loss Principle (Risk):** Entrepreneurs should not focus on possible profits but on the possible losses and how losses can be minimised;
- **The Crazy Quilt Principle (Partnerships):** Entrepreneurs cooperate with parties they can trust. These parties can limit affordable loss by giving pre-commitment. An entrepreneur creates these partnerships by self-selecting stakeholders or agreeing on commitments from critical partners early in the venture. Experts reduce uncertainty and co-create the new market with its interested participants;

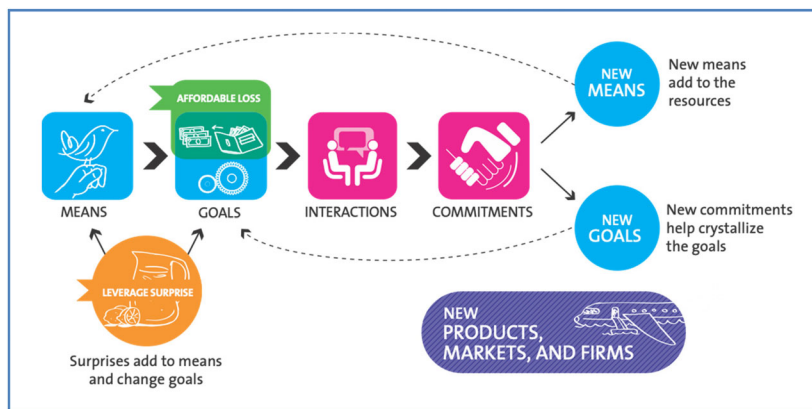


Figure 3. The Effectuation Process. Source: Sarasvathy, S. (2011) *What is Effectuation?* [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

- **The Lemonade Principle (Opportunities):** Entrepreneurs look at how to leverage contingencies. Surprises are not necessarily negative or harmful but are opportunities to identify new markets and opportunities. Through this, entrepreneurs interpret surprises as potential clues to create new markets;
- **The Pilot-in-the-Plane (Control vs Predict):** All the previous principles are connected here. The future is unpredictable, but entrepreneurs can control some factors that determine their future. By focusing on activities within their control, entrepreneurs understand that their actions will result in the desired outcomes.

Figure 3 illustrates Sarasvathy's *Effectuation* process, representing an entrepreneurship process for creating products, markets and business ventures. *Effectuation* is not prescriptive or chronological but a heuristic principle that applies to

entrepreneurs' challenges (Kennedy, 2023). The process begins with identifying an inventory of means, and goals are then imagined and pursued within an entrepreneur's affordable loss bandwidth. Once goals are identified, interactions drive the entrepreneurship process through recognising and aligning with key partners. Finally, stakeholders influence entrepreneurs to adapt the original business idea into one to which all are committed. This cycle continues as an entrepreneur grows closer to creating defined, sellable products or services with engaged customers and stakeholders in the market.

With the *Effectuation* model, an entrepreneur does not start with a predetermined goal but with the tools or means. *Effectuation* is similar to the uncertainty and ambiguity experienced at the start of the design process (Kennedy, 2023). The effectuation principles and the design processes have some similarities. However, the literature needs to discuss implementing *Effectuation* in

design enterprises, which suggests that design entrepreneurs are unfamiliar with the process or are unaware of its relationship with the design process.

Business Model Canvas. Osterwalder (2004) proposed the *Business Model Canvas* (Martin, 2009) as a strategic management template for developing new or documenting existing Business Models (DeReuver et al., 2013; Barquet et al., 2011). The *Business Model Canvas* codifies many concepts from the literature on business model innovations (Martin, 2009) and offers a clear and concise way to communicate entrepreneurship opportunities (Blundel et al., 2021).

The *Business Model Canvas* is an organised way to lay out assumptions that entrepreneurs have about resources and activities of their value chain, but also their value proposition, customer relationships, channels, customer segments, cost structures and revenue streams (Blundel et al., 2021; Ovans, 2015; Clark, 2012; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

The *Business Model Canvas* (see Figure 4) is a visual diagram that captures Osterwalder's concept and describes a firm's or product's value proposition, infrastructure, customers, and finances. The diagram aligns a firm's activities, highlights potential trade-offs, and provides a visual shorthand for simplifying complex organisations (Clark, 2012).

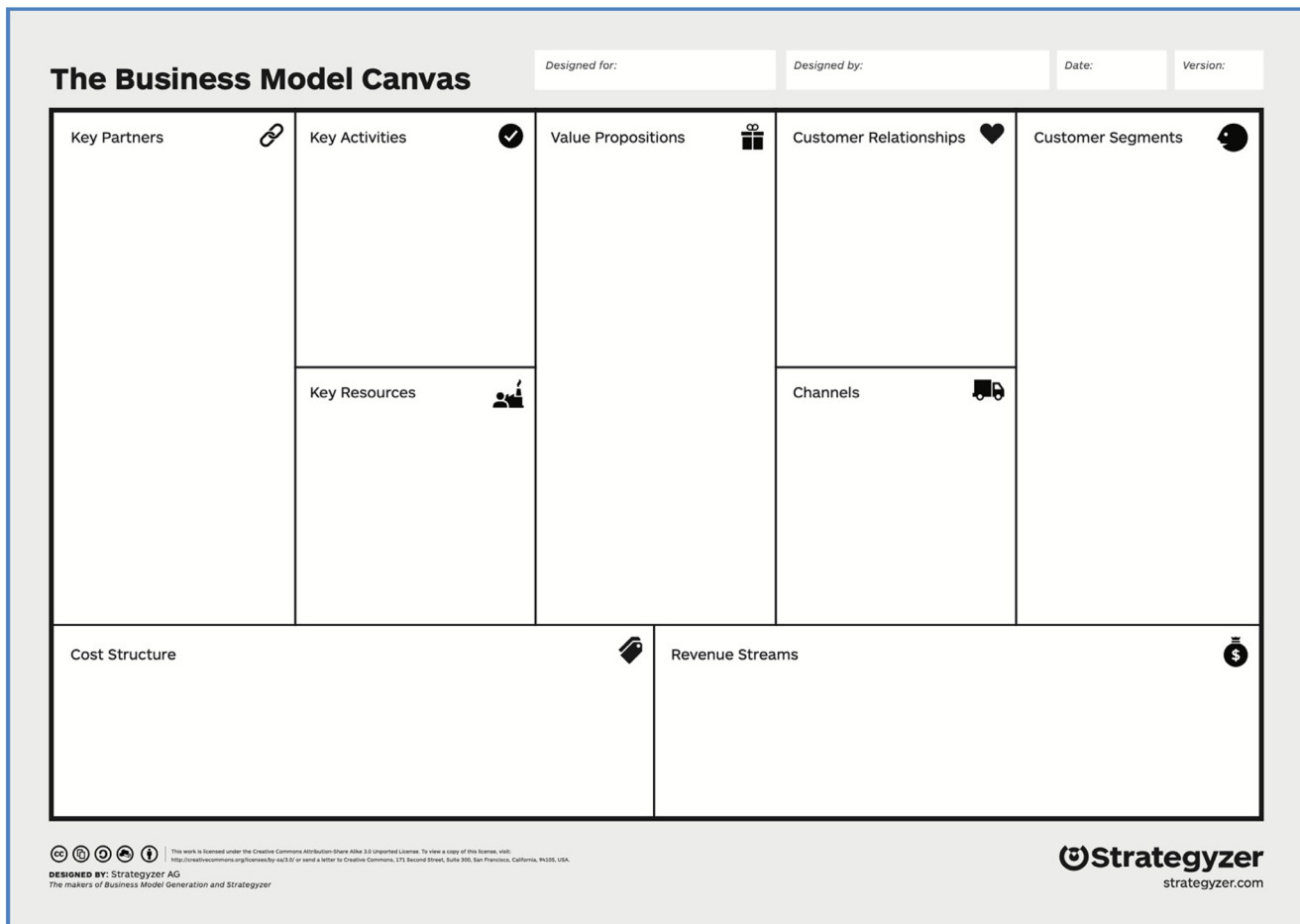


Figure 4. The Business Model Canvas. Source: Strategyzer (2023). [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/dm.12096)]

The nine fundamental principles in the Business Model Canvas (Clark, 2012; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010) are:

- **Customers** and **Customer Segments** are the reason for the enterprise's existence;
- **Value Proposition** describes the series of products and services an enterprise creates for a customers;
- **Channels** describe how an enterprise communicates with its specific customer segments;
- **Customer Relationships** establish the specific type of relationship between the enterprise and its customers;
- **Revenue Streams** identify how the firm will generate cash for each customer segment;
- **Key Resources** allow entrepreneurs to reach markets and maintain customer relationships that generate revenue;
- **Key Activities** include production, selling and supporting enterprise;
- **Key Partners** are the network of suppliers and partners;
- **Cost Structure** describes the costs incurred while operating an enterprise.

There needs to be a discussion in the literature demonstrating the effective use of the *Business Model Canvas* in Communication Design enterprises. However, as a visual tool, it is reasonable to assume that it may benefit a sector that utilises visualisation as a product offering. However, since the publication of the

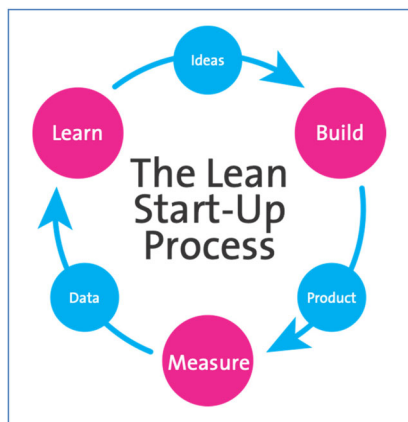


Figure 5. The Lean Start-Up Process. Source: Ries, E. (2011a) *The Lean Start-Up*. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Business Model Canvas, new canvases such as the Lean Canvas (LeanStack, 2023) or Kaospilot (2017) have been developed for specific business niches, suggesting that such a technique could be adapted for other sectors.

The *Business Model Canvas* simplifies the process of business modelling and covers areas where there are concerns regarding competencies in the design sector in Ireland and internationally have been raised (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2016; Intertrade Ireland, 2009; Design Council, 2005); this suggests that the *Business Model Canvas* may partly apply to the Communication Design sector. However, it has its challenges, as the literature indicates that design sector entrepreneurs need assistance understanding some of the sections specified in the *Business Model Canvas* (Kennedy, 2023).

Lean Start-Up. The *Lean Start-Up* (see Figure 5) was proposed in 2008

by Eric Ries (2011a) and allows constant adjustment through a *Build-Measure-Learn* feedback loop (Ries, 2011a). Therefore, rather than entrepreneurs making complex assumptions from the outset, *Lean* facilitates an opportunity to adjust assumptions based on new or changing information gathered from market responses. Once an entrepreneur has learned from this feedback loop, a decision can be made if the business or product needs to pivot or persevere with its current direction (LeanStack, 2023; Blank, 2012; Ries, 2011a, 2011b). By adopting the *Lean Start-Up* process, entrepreneurs can shorten the product development cycles through hypothesis-driven experimentation, iterative product releases, validated learning, and quickly acquiring customer feedback (Hussein, 2015; Blank, 2012; Adler & Dagostino, 2011; Ries, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c).

The *Lean Start-Up* consists of several key concepts. According to Ries (2015; 2011a), these concepts are:

- **Eliminate Uncertainty:** Entrepreneurs can create order rather than chaos by testing the company's vision;
- **Work Smarter, Not Harder:** Every start-up is an experiment attempting to build a viable product. When that product is ready it will have established customers;
- **Develop an MVP:** The first step is identifying the problem and developing a Minimum Viable

Product (MVP) to learn from customers. The MVP can be fine-tuned through measurement and learning with actionable metrics. When this process of measuring and learning is completed, it will be apparent if the enterprise is viable. If not, it is an indication that it is time to pivot and take the business in a new direction;

- **Validated Learning:** Progress is achieved through validated learning. Entrepreneurs can adapt their plans incrementally. A start-up business is an experiment that beta-tests product offerings in the marketplace before refining them into a more desirable product.

However, the *Lean Start-Up* approach may not universally apply to developing all products or enterprises. Burgstone (2012) criticises Ries' claims that it can provide a roadmap for new product development, arguing that companies are not standardised, efficient, or predictable. The MVP concept encourages swift product introduction and learning from customer feedback, which can be detrimental. In Communication Design, using the MVP approach to test brand concepts has led to adverse outcomes, as seen in the 2001 rebranding of Gap (Halliday, 2010), which faced severe consumer backlash, prompting its rapid withdrawal (Fraikin, 2016; Bloomberg, 2010; Elliott, 2010). This failure stemmed from Gap's decision to skip the iterative design process and



Figure 6. Gap Rebrand. Fraikin, G (2016) GAP: 6 years later — still worst rebrand ever. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

launch the rebrand directly to customers without consultation (Kennedy, 2023). The estimated revenue loss during the debacle was approximately \$100 million (Canny, 2017), underlining the importance of robust design processes over market testing alone. Gap's attempt to beta-test its brand identity using the market backfired (Figure 6).

The Gap is one of many examples of bypassing the established design processes with MVP approaches. Brands like Tropicana (Elliott, 2010), Kraft Foods (Duncan, 2010), Animal Planet, Master Card, and Pepsi (Cleary, 2017) have faced negative consumer sentiment due to MVP-type rebrands. Though each case differs, they share the practice of bypassing established design processes for direct market feedback (Kennedy, 2023). Ries (2011a) defines an MVP as the smallest product unit for testing assumptions. Launching imperfect products for market testing can lead to products and services not meeting customer needs, causing frustration and mistrust, and potentially damaging sales. Kennedy (2023) asserts that client relationships are crucial for

design enterprise success, making any process harming these relationships unsuitable in design. While the Lean process lacks discussion in Communication Design literature, similarities exist with the design process, such as iterative idea generation and feedback validation (Kennedy, 2023). Communication Design's bespoke nature limits market testing to internal beta testing within studios and discussions with design teams and clients (Kennedy, 2023).

Discussion

Over time, entrepreneurship has evolved in response to societal changes, consumer preferences, and technological advancements. Various approaches to entrepreneurship exist, offering partial applicability to design enterprises and aiding in process segmentation (Plazm, 2003). For instance, breaking down Communication Design into design and business subjects allows for creative business applications (Plazm, 2003).

Design enterprises face unique challenges and are often advised to adopt existing entrepreneurship models (Preddy, 2011;

Minale, 1996). However, the persistent skill deficit among design entrepreneurs suggests the need for tailored models (Preddy, 2011; Minale, 1996). Industries frequently require new business models (Johnson et al., 2008), acknowledging that one size does not fit all in entrepreneurship. The lack of explicit discussion on entrepreneurship in Communication Design literature highlights the opportunity to develop specific approaches for its application in design enterprises.

Business Model for Communication Design Enterprises

The literature indicates several critical themes relating to communication design and entrepreneurship. Some wildly differ, some are contradictory, some exclusively reside in one paradigm, and some are different aspects of the same theme. Nevertheless, themes are recurrent within the theoretical relationship between communication design and entrepreneurship, suggesting a relationship previously overlooked in the literature.

The similarities in these processes have previously remained unconnected in the literature (Kennedy, 2023). Furthermore, an identified and prevailing skill deficit in Communication Design centres around entrepreneurship and business skills; therefore, a specific approach for a Business Model that applies to Communication Design enterprises is required. A specific

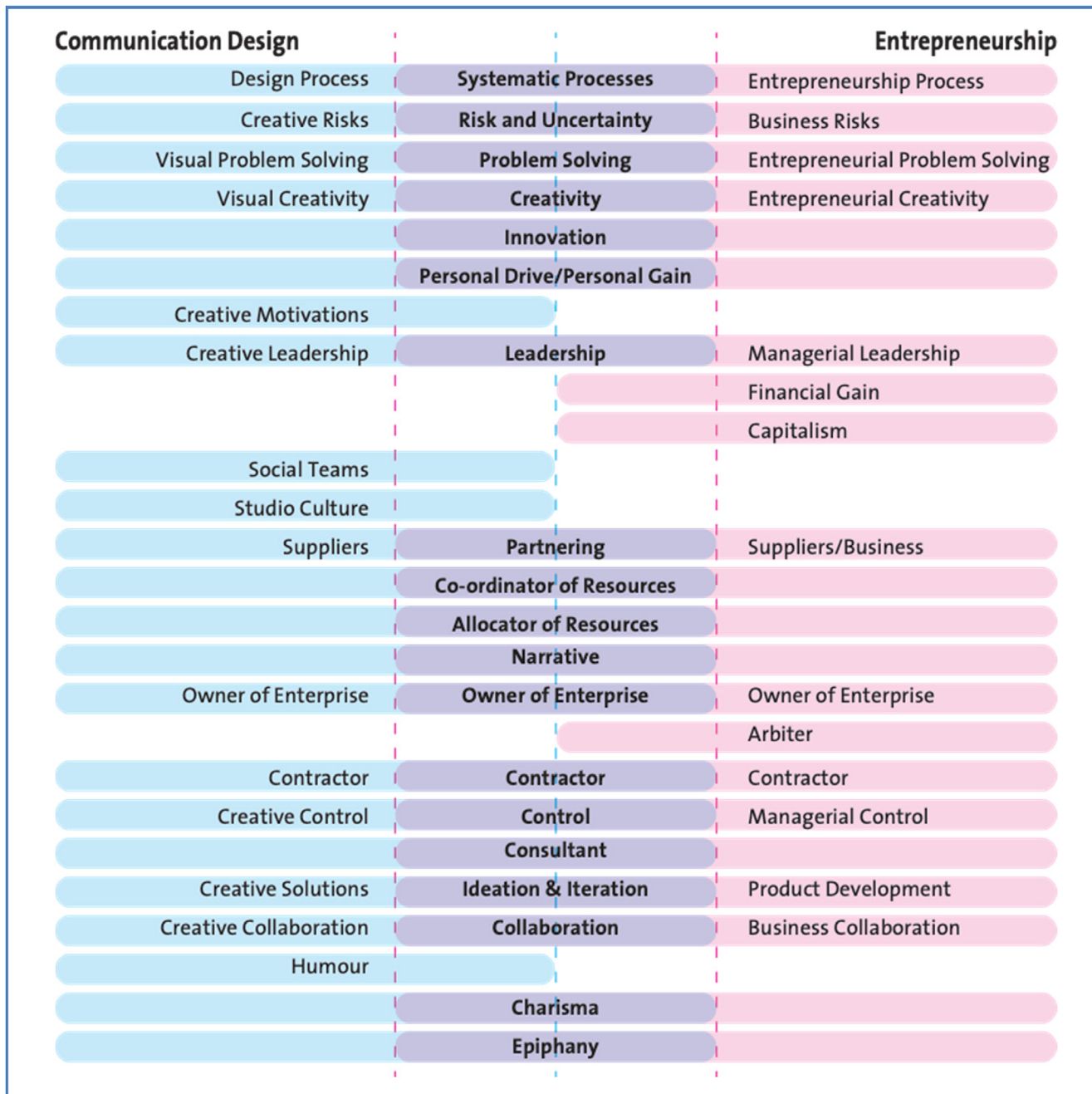


Figure 7. Key Themes Identified within the Literature. Source: Author. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/dm.12096)]

entrepreneurship design-led approach may help to develop design enterprises further and improve design entrepreneurs' competencies.

Figure 7 illustrates the relationship between these themes. The diagram highlights the commonalities between the aspects of

both disciplines, and it also indicates differences, be those themes exclusively relating to one discipline or different aspects of the same

theme; therefore, a relationship exists between the design and entrepreneurship processes. Understanding this relationship better explains the entrepreneurship process in a method relevant to designers and design entrepreneurs. As a result, gaps and commonalities in the literature were identified, and it was possible to link these concepts of entrepreneurship and design in a unifying manner.

In addressing the gap in the literature, a theoretical framework for a Business Model for Communication Design enterprises was developed by the author by critically assessing the literature on entrepreneurship and Communication Design. Once this framework was developed, feedback was sought from design entrepreneurs to the efficacy of the proposed framework. This process was supported by conducting semi-structured interviews with prominent design entrepreneurs, conducting thematic analysis, and conducting desk research.

Initially, 396 design enterprises were identified as potential candidates, and contact was made with multiple design entrepreneurs from 32 design enterprises, some of whom agreed to participate in the research. Forty-six design entrepreneurs were considered suitable interview participants. From this group, sixteen design entrepreneurs consented to participate in an interview with the completion of twelve interviews. This group represents the communications

design sector as a whole as participants reflect factors such as the age of the enterprise, location, and gender balance. Each interview participant is a founding design entrepreneur in their enterprise or, in one case, fulfilling this role. Therefore, interview participants are considered to contribute high-value insights to this research because of their status and experience within the communication design sector.

The interviews were designed to take approximately 60 minutes. A list of questions was developed and prototyped with three independent experts. Questions covered specific issues relating to entrepreneurship in communication design. Some general questions concerning entrepreneurship were included, and specific questions regarding the entrepreneur's approach to their enterprise's entrepreneurship process. Questions were designed to be open-ended, allowing interviewees to respond to the questions freely. The purpose of the interviews is to gather data relating to the experiences of design entrepreneurs, with cognisance of perceived benefits and particular approaches to entrepreneurship that may be implemented in individual communication design enterprises. The interviews examined each design entrepreneur's understanding of the entrepreneurship process and the perceived benefits of a design-specific business model. Gathering personal experiences of entrepreneurship in communication design is essential for this study, as the participants come from industry

backgrounds with differing experiences; therefore, understanding these experiences is crucial.

The primary data analysis began with open coding, or the creation of free nodes and grouping of data into manageable categories based on content (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), central to which is the coding, which involves the researcher interacting with data using comparison, questioning, and deriving concepts from the findings. Once completed, the author moved to the axial coding stage, which is a qualitative research technique involving relating data to reveal themes, codes, categories, and subcategories grounded within participants' voices within the collected data (Allen, 2017). Therefore, axial coding is a way of constructing links within the data. In addition, axial coding involves comparing emergent themes within the data set to make theoretical claims regarding the conducted research. As coding progressed, the author acquired a new understanding of a Business Model for Communication Design Enterprises through grouping and coding data according to the emergent themes.

Several conclusions are drawn from the analysis of the data. Firstly, it is evident that design entrepreneurs identify as designers rather than entrepreneurs because design entrepreneurs have different motivations than other entrepreneurs. Design entrepreneurs' primary motivation is to create, meaning that design is the primary output of their enterprise, and creativity is paramount.

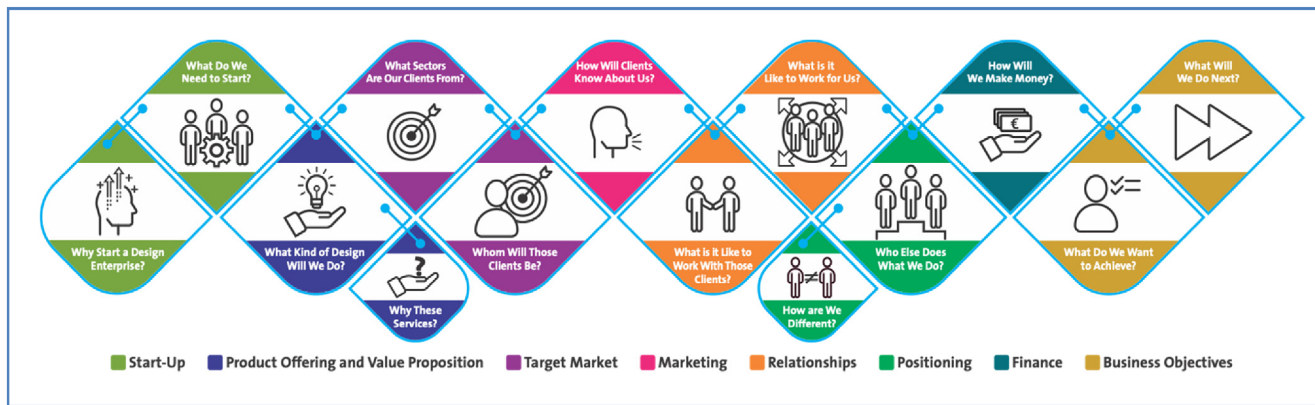


Figure 8. Design Enterprise Business Model. Source: Author. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Therefore, it is understandable that even design entrepreneurs identify as practitioners, not entrepreneurs. Self-identification as a designer will impact their viewpoint of the entrepreneurship process, meaning that the iteration of the theoretical framework must consider this insight and that the entrepreneurship process for designers must be viewed through that lens.

A better understanding of the entrepreneurship process among design entrepreneurs is needed. However, many participants have successfully run their enterprises for many years and decades in some cases. Nonetheless, this contradicts the apparent need for more understanding of entrepreneurship; therefore, design entrepreneurs view the entrepreneurship process through their constructed worldview, in that there is an unrecognised design-specific process for entrepreneurship. However, there is evidence that the sector lacks tools or a process framework to make entrepreneurship in design more accessible for design entrepreneurs, and the participants acknowledge the need

to develop a design-specific approach to entrepreneurship.

Communication Design-Led Business Model. This paper further develops entrepreneurship theory by devising a Business Model specific to design entrepreneurs. The development of the business model was completed by exploring the concepts identified within the literature and analysing the themes that emerged through robust discussions with key industry stakeholders. This model connects themes from the literature on entrepreneurship and design, the concepts that emerged during the primary research process, and the interviews conducted as part of this research (see Figure 8). As a result, the design Business Model is a novel contribution to the field through synthesis and emerging insights, as it represents an understanding of entrepreneurship delivered through the lens of a design entrepreneur. This model focuses on design as entrepreneurship.

Discussions with interview participants indicated the need for tools to aid designers in making entrepreneurial decisions and help understand their enterprises' entrepreneurship process (Kennedy, 2023). The Design Enterprise Business Model presented in this study is a tool for design entrepreneurs to use in planning, iterating, and prototyping their design enterprises. Nevertheless, interview participants in this study indicated difficulty understanding the themes and language used in other tools; these issues are addressed with this model. Therefore, the contribution presented in this paper focuses on creating an understanding of the entrepreneurship process viewed through the lens of a design entrepreneur. The *Design Enterprise Business Model* serves as a discussion in which design entrepreneurs can better understand the entrepreneurship process in a language and with topics pertinent to designers.

The sections for the Design Enterprise Business Model are.

Start-up:

- Why Start a Design Enterprise? Entrepreneurs must establish the motivations for forming their design enterprise (Ries, 2015; Nussbaum, 2013; Society for Effectual Action, 2012; Preddy, 2011). Motivations may include necessity entrepreneurship, locus of control, income generation, self-employment, the influence of other designers, social change, creative expression, family influence, and knowledge of the sector (Kennedy, 2023).
- What Do We Need to Start? This section identifies the resources required to form and make a design enterprise successful (Ovans, 2015; Clark, 2012; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; O'Kane, 2009; Murphy et al., 2006; Grebel, 2004; Timmons, 1999). Here, seed capital, physical resources, such as computer equipment and office furniture, staff requirements, suppliers and location of the enterprise are investigated (Kennedy, 2023).

Product Offering and Value Proposition:

- What Type of Design Will We Do? This section identifies what primary, secondary, and support design services the enterprise will provide (Airey, 2013;

Preddy, 2011; Foote, 2002; Minale, 1996). Many design entrepreneurs position their value proposition on high-quality design services, creative reputation and the relationships they have with clients (Kennedy, 2023).

- Why These Services? After deciding on the service offering, design entrepreneurs need to understand why they are delivering it. They must also ensure that their enterprise has the right skills and competencies to deliver their value proposition (Kennedy, 2023; Ovans, 2015; Clark, 2012; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

Target Market:

- What Sectors Are Our Clients From? In this section, design entrepreneurs establish the customer segment the enterprise will target with their design services and value proposition (Ovans, 2015; Nussbaum, 2013; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Design entrepreneurs place great significance on developing relationships for targeting clients and referrals from current clients (Kennedy, 2023).
- Who Will Those Clients Be? The analysis of the client base of the Communication Design sector indicated that the sector delivers its value proposition for corporate clients, governmental clients, cultural clients, not-for-profit clients, education clients, and political clients. Design

entrepreneurs need to identify who will be their clients (Kennedy, 2023).

Marketing:

- How Will Clients Know About Us? Entrepreneurs identify opportunities within their market (Bolton & Thompson, 2004), and a marketing strategy is essential for assessing the viability of an enterprise (Blundel et al., 2021). Design entrepreneurs tend to market their enterprises through their website, which is a digital portfolio of work completed, through their creative reputation, through social media, or through the relationships they have with existing clients (Kennedy, 2023). However, some use a structured approach to marketing their enterprise and identifying potential clients of interest (Kennedy, 2023).

Relationships:

- What is it Like to Work With Those Clients? Design entrepreneurs place great importance on developing relationships with clients. Their relationships with clients tend to be mutually trusting, informal and social, which seems conducive to creating a high-quality design (Kennedy, 2023). Entrepreneurs must engage with those they can trust (Society for Effectual Action, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2011).

These are values seen as crucial in the sector.

- What is it Like to Work for Us? Studio culture establishes the enterprise's relationship with clients and suppliers (Nussbaum, 2013; Florida, 2012; Lupton, 2011; Brook & Shaughnessy, 2009; Plazm, 2003) and staff. Design entrepreneurs create a culture with their enterprise that facilitates creativity and collaboration through empathy and well-being (Kennedy, 2023). Studio culture stems from the leadership style of the creative director (Kennedy, 2023), which affects the management of the enterprise and the relationships with staff and clients (Giudice & Ireland, 2014; Florida, 2012; Murphy et al., 2006; Jackson et al., 2001).

Positioning:

- Who Else Does What We Do? All enterprises have competitors, and entrepreneurs must identify them (Preddy, 2011; O'Gorman & Cunningham, 2007; O'Kane, 2001; Drucker, 1994). However, some design entrepreneurs are reluctant to identify their peers as the competition, while others identify that their competitors are from different sectors or are international competitors (Kennedy, 2023).
- How are We Different? Entrepreneurs must adopt a position of differentiation in their market and establish how the

target market perceives them (Clark, 2012; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). For example, many design entrepreneurs position their enterprises based on size, capabilities, and design services (Kennedy, 2023). However, creative reputation is strongly emphasised as a point of difference (Kennedy, 2023). Some design entrepreneurs utilise age and geographic location as a point of difference from their competitors (Kennedy, 2023).

Finance:

- How Will We Make Money? Design entrepreneurs must identify revenue streams (Blundel et al., 2021; Ovans, 2015; Clark, 2012; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; O'Kane, 2009). Revenue streams in the design sector derived through the delivery of creative work are typical hourly or day rates or assignment rates (Kennedy, 2023). Revenues generated by the enterprise cover overhead costs (Ovans, 2015; Clark, 2012; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; O'Kane, 2009), and after costs are deducted, a surplus profit may be generated (O'Kane, 2009; Murphy et al., 2006; Drucker, 1994; Good, 1989; Kao, 1989). All enterprises must make a financial profit to survive and grow (P6 and P11). However, financial profit may be a secondary consideration for design

entrepreneurs, as the focus of the enterprise's output is creativity (Kennedy, 2023). For others, profit can mean employee welfare, positive client relationships, or creative reputation (Kennedy, 2023).

Business Objectives:

- What Do We Want to Achieve? Design entrepreneurs must establish the key objectives for their enterprise (Airey, 2013; George & Bock, 2012; O'Gorman & Cunningham, 2007; Shaughnessy, 2005; Jackson et al., 2001). For many, objectives are maintaining creative standards, creating a sustainable enterprise, or diversifying their client base (Kennedy, 2023).
- What Will We Do Next? When enterprises are successful and grow, they require additional resources (Airey, 2013; Ries, 2011a; Roush, 2011; Foote, 2002). Some design entrepreneurs identified the need to allocate investment for physical resources or additional staff resources (Kennedy, 2023). However, there are also opportunities to assess the enterprise's progress and revisit any assumptions previously made. Reassessing values and objectives allows for change or preservation of the enterprise's objectives (Reis, 2015; Sarasvathy, 2004; Bygrave, 2003). For some design entrepreneurs, this is an

opportunity to offer new or additional design services (Kennedy, 2023). However, for others, this is an opportunity for succession planning or to identify an opportunity for a merger or acquisition of the enterprise (Kennedy, 2023).

Initially, the *Design Enterprise Business Model* was developed as a hypothesis by assessing the themes identified in the literature. However, primary research, feedback, and insights from interview participants allowed for reassessing the assumptions in that hypothesis. As a result, this adjusted design business model offers a clearer understanding of entrepreneurship in design, with themes relevant to implementation in design enterprises. Feedback from interview participants indicated that the proposed Business Model for Communication Design Enterprises offered them a greater relevance to their worldview of entrepreneurship, as it is delivered through the lens of a design entrepreneur. The model offers greater clarity and thinking regarding the entrepreneurship process for their enterprises and offers a better alternative to existing strategies.

Conclusions

This study identified a paucity of research on entrepreneurship in design. The literature views entrepreneurship and design as two distinct and unconnected paradigms. However, this research connects the

two disciplines in a new and novel way. First, it acknowledges a relationship between entrepreneurship and design processes, and this research focuses on developing a Business Model for Communication Design Enterprises; therefore, the research resides within the paradigm of entrepreneurship. However, this study does not examine the creative outputs of design enterprises or how those outputs are achieved, as this is a different research question. Communication Design is recognised as a creative process; however, it is not recognised as an output of entrepreneurship. Like any other enterprise, design enterprises must generate revenue streams and profits to survive. Therefore, the creativity of Communication Design resides within a commercial environment with fees charged to paying clients, meaning that design entrepreneurs' decisions, processes and actions are ultimately entrepreneurial. This study indicated that Communication Design is a creative entrepreneurial activity within an economic paradigm. As such, this firmly positions this study within the literature on entrepreneurship, precisely that of entrepreneurship in small and micro-enterprises. This study collected data from multiple participants from the Communication Design sector and captured critical insights from these key stakeholders. Their viewpoints helped develop a new perspective in creating the Design Enterprise Business Model—this research

positions Communication Design as an output of Entrepreneurship, not as an output of creativity.

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