

The new and the young – Kuhn revisited

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We are on the cusp of a new era for applied psychological research. It has been claimed by Research Councils UK (RCUK) that '[n]ovel, multidisciplinary approaches are needed to solve many, if not all, of the big research challenges over the next 10 to 20 years'. The 'poverty of imagination' is an increasingly prevalent view across the arts, humanities and sciences, and it has been cast as an imminent crisis (Brown et al., 2010). This article critically reflects on the role psychology and communication design can play in assisting with these challenges and why emerging researchers are best placed to contribute.

Crisis?

It would be wrong to suggest psychology to be in a state of absolute crisis. However, the complex problems we find in nature and society today – e.g. global uncertainties of terrorism, environmental change and the emergence of digital economies – are increasingly calling for interdisciplinary exploration (Beers et al., 2006; Inns, 2007; Massey et al., 2006). As Kuhn noted in 1962:

Confronted with anomaly or with crisis, scientists take a different attitude toward existing paradigms, and the nature of their research changes accordingly. The proliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything, the expression of explicit discontent, the recourse to philosophy and to debate

over fundamentals, all these are symptoms of a transition from normal to extraordinary research. (pp.90–91)

In periods of 'normal science', research communities operate within a system of shared beliefs and established boundaries. When disciplines join forces, fundamental changes in thinking shift these parameters. These new paradigms change the rules of the game, expanding the boundaries of exploration to enable new 'ways of seeing' and novel opportunities for solutions (Crilly, 2010). This process requires continual translation and negotiation between disciplines to create a hybrid of language, knowledge and boundaries (Klein, 1996).

But what happens when seemingly disparate fields unite?

Integrating communication design

Communication design is defined as 'the action of conceiving, programming, projecting, and realizing visual communications that are usually produced through industrial means and are aimed at broadcasting specific messages to specific sectors of the public. This is done with a view toward having an impact on the public's knowledge, attitudes, or behavior in an intended direction' (Frascara, 2004, p.2). Whilst connections between communication design, experimental and social psychology have been noted anecdotally (Frascara, 2004), these have not been examined in detail. Indeed, the arts and

sciences were once considered 'ostensibly distinct branches of human activity' (Crilly, 2010, p.57).

However, the synergy between communication design and social psychology can be found in Sanderson's (2010, p.4) definition of social psychology as 'the scientific study of how people's thoughts, attitudes and behaviors are influenced by factors in the social world'. Communication design might be considered the strategic act of impacting these attributes. This reciprocity is also reflected in mounting appreciation that our relationship with the designed world determines how we shape and experience life (Brown et al., 2010). Accordingly, the value of psychologists joining forces with communication designers lies not simply in novelty or informational exchange, but in the opportunity to use psychological insight to design the world differently and bring about attitudinal and behavioural change.

How might collaborative research between psychology and communication design address the most pressing issues we face in society today? The EPSRC have been instrumental in fostering collaborations of this type, recognising the value of multiple perspectives in driving lateral thinking and radical approaches in contemporary science. They have spearheaded residential events, or 'sandpits' as they are more commonly known, as one forum for thinking of this kind. Sandpits involve a formal application and selection process for researchers across the spectrum of academia to partner with stakeholders and develop research-led approaches to societal challenges. See Bharat Maldé's (2011) article on sandpit psychology and Jump's (2011) critical review of collaborative research funding for further detail.

Science Team: The Public View of Uncertainty, led by Dr Emma Soane (London School of Economics), is one example of a sandpit-inspired project drawing specialist expertise from fields as diverse as biology, oceanography,

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