UX Design Institute

Industry Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

13 October 2021

The UX Design Institute's latest Industry Advisory Council meeting took place on October 13th, 2021. This was a hybrid event as Covid-19 restrictions ease, with some people partaking on Zoom and others in person.

The aims of the meeting were to:

- Give members a progress report since the last meeting
- Have a roundtable discussion on UX after Covid, and its impact on ways of working
- Have a roundtable discussion on common skills gaps for design teams, and junior designers in particular
- Discuss any other business

The Industry Advisory Council members in attendance were:

Tansy Murray, *VP of CX & Design at Mastercard*

Goran Peuc, *Principal UX Designer at SAP*

Denis Cullinane, *Senior Manager, Product Design at Dell*

Becca Finegan, *User Research Manager at Meta*

Jonathon Colman, *Senior Design Manager, Content Design at Hubspot*

Gareth Dunlop, *Chief Digital Officer at Lowe and Behold*

Frank Gaine, *Head of Product Design at MediaHuis*

Ronan Costello, *Director of Digital Customer Experiences at Analog Devices*

Catherine Wilson, *UX Research and Design Manager, Aer Lingus*

Dara Boland, *Enterprise Sales at Hubspot, formerly Associate Director at Morgan McKinley*

Denise Leahy, *Quality Chair of IAC, formerly Associate Professor of Computer Science at Trinity College Dublin*

Colman Walsh, *Founder and CEO of the UX Design Institute*

Conor Normile, *Head of Product at the UX Design Institute*

Industry Advisory Council members not in attendance:

Ruairi Galavan, *Director of Customer Engagement at Intercom*

Brian Herron, *Principle Design and Director at Each&Other*

Tim Bicknell, *Founder at Deep Cove*

Mark Mulhall, *Freelance Product Designer*

Garry Cleere, *Managing Director at Complivero*

Tansy Murray
VP of CX & Design
Mastercard

Goran Peuc
Principal UX Designer
SAP

Denis Cullinane
Senior Manager,
Product Design
Dell Technologies

Becca Finnegan
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Jonathon Colman
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Trinity College Dublin

Council summary

1. Welcome

Colman Walsh welcomed everyone to the latest Industry Advisory Council of the UX Design Institute and thanked them for their time.

2. Progress report

Colman told the IAC that student numbers have continued to grow despite Covid-19. He announced that the Institute saw a big boost in student numbers in the first quarter of 2021 as the first lockdowns started, with many people turning to education to upskill or reskill from careers that had been threatened by Covid-19.

He restated the core mission of the UX Design Institute: helping people build meaningful and rewarding careers. Colman shared some of the 'SMOJ' (spontaneous messages of joy) that arrives each week from students and graduates who are achieving their career goals after completing Institute programmes.

Colman announced that the UX Design Institute has expanded its career support service to include 1:1 interview prep, portfolio prep sessions and career webinars with UX hiring managers.

Conor Normile told the IAC that two new six-week courses had been introduced, covering software fundamentals and UX fundamentals for non-practitioners. Both of these short courses are university credit-rated.

3. Roundtable discussion

Back to Normality? UX beyond Covid

With companies easing out of Covid-19 restrictions and experimenting with a new reality, the IAC were asked for their takeaways on how Covid-19 has impacted on design practice and ways of working within their organisations.

The group started by discussing workshops. Becca mentioned that her team at Meta haven't returned to in-person workshops as there's no inter-office travel just yet. Ronan Costello's first in-person workshop had happened. Ronan reported that it was mentally intense for people, particularly for those who had not collaborated at all in-person for more than a year.

Goran Peuc said that it's too early to talk about a new world. But what you are seeing is a direct split between senior people and junior designers who are new to the workplace. Senior people are now comfortable with remote working, but the junior designers need senior people around them to grow and learn through osmosis. This doesn't happen as effectively with remote working.

This sentiment was shared across the group. Denise Leahy made the point that we probably don't appreciate how much knowledge is shared when people are walking the floors.

Catherine Wilson said that she is seeing junior designers who would grow much faster if senior designers were around, but that's not happening as much yet.

Tansy Murray echoed that, saying that because junior designers aren't seeing the value of being around senior colleagues, many of them at interview stage are requesting a preference for remote work. Even though being surrounded by experienced peers will be the thing that will catalyse their careers.

Becca Finnegan from Meta mentioned that her organisation isn't yet selling the idea of going back into the office. Right now, it's a choice. Becca said that maybe for junior designers there needs to be some persuasion of the benefits.

Colman said that it does depend on the context of each business. From his perspective as a small and fast-growing business, the ability to get back and collaborate in person has made a big difference to productivity.

On the topic of returning to the office, Denis made the point that during the lockdowns when everybody was on Zoom, there was a completely equitable experience. But the challenge will be when we have a hybrid setup, with some people in the office and some at home. Nobody has really come up with a good solution for that yet. The big conferencing companies are working on it, but the technology isn't there yet to provide an equitable experience for both in-person and virtual attendees.

Upskilling for design teams

The discussion moved on to the topic of skills that junior designers need to develop. The UX Design Institute's product roadmap is informed by a range of inputs, not least the discussions with the IAC. Today's agenda item was an opportunity to take a look at where IAC members felt junior designers needed help most.

Jonathon Colman highlighted communication skills, both written and spoken. This is an area where senior designers could often use help too. He mentioned that facilitation and workshop design skills would also benefit junior designers, as would having negotiation skills - being able to have hard conversations with other people in the business to defend design decisions.

Tansy followed up by saying that a huge skills gap for designers is the ability to influence and persuade decision makers. She also talked about the need for designers to be able to express why a decision was made - to toggle from talking about the work to talking about the reasons behind decisions. Another skills gap Tansy mentioned was the ability to give and receive feedback, calling out Kim Scott's book Radical Candour as a brilliant book on the topic of delivering feedback. Practising the art of feedback makes designers better, and it makes products better, said Tansy.

Denis Cullinane spoke on the same point about soft skills. UX training mostly focuses on systems, design processes and surface level skills like interface design. But the biggest gap to bridge concerns soft skills.

Dara Boland asked if the UX Design Institute had considered offering placements or industry internships as a way for students to get familiar with the softer skills and how to succeed in the workplace.

Colman mentioned that while placements would be difficult to scale internationally, the Institute has been helping to place students on an ad-hoc basis and has plans to implement a more formal programme over the coming year to connect graduates with hiring companies and internships.

Catherine Wilson followed by saying that soft skills also extend to learning how to collaborate effectively with other members of the team - from engineering to product management. And on the harder skills side, she sees product designers who have a very strong command of the interface design side of things, but still struggle to think about which user problems to solve.

Conclusion

Colman thanked everybody for their time and for a productive and valuable discussion. Colman finished by saying that while it was too early to draw any firm conclusions of UX after Covid, it did seem that hybrid meetings were here to stay.