

“Design Self-Deception: Challenges in the Early Stage of Entrepreneurship”

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The phenomenon of entrepreneurship has been installed in the Argentine imagination. Its dissemination has been possible, due to the construction of a discourse loaded with seductive slogans aimed at young professionals who seek to enter an increasingly reduced labor market. It is common to read phrases like: “Be your own boss”, “I chased your dream”, “Boost your skills” to name just a few. Organizations and institutions act as a sounding board for these optimistic and hopeful messages. Loaded with meritocratic and individualistic overtones, they use the exposition of “success stories” to create iconic references and stereotypes.

Through them, the idea of working in a flexible, relaxed way and eliminating hierarchies is transmitted, at the expense of the self-exploitation of the entrepreneur (Han, 2014), who works weekly more hours than what is established by the Labor Law (IDB, 2012) and in informal conditions that are harmful to the productivity of these enterprises. There is talk of team and interdisciplinary work, but also of self-reliance and self-control. Entrepreneurs must become “entrepreneurs of themselves” and are “responsible for their destiny.” These micro-subjective discourses and practices can be framed in what Foucault calls the «technologies of the self» referring to techniques that:

”They allow individuals to carry out, on their own account or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their body and soul, thoughts, behavior, or any form of being, thus obtaining a transformation of themselves in order to achieve a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom or immortality” (2008, p48).

As stated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos: “entrepreneurship gives glamor to precariousness” and builds an entrepreneurial fiction that, mainly in the early stage of entrepreneurship,

is sustained by the concept that we seek to develop in this article, design self-deception. We can define them as:

Those formal or informal practices that can be perceived as weaknesses of the enterprise, and that negatively impact its genuine constitution, but that paradoxically are conditioners of possibility for the project to be viable and can even be decisive and in case of not being present, put the continuity of the enterprise at risk.

Here are some examples from your own professional practice and from fellow design entrepreneurs. This list will be incomplete, flexible and far from any kind of axiomatic aspiration. It does not seek to become a recipe for nothing, but it is proposed to share information in real time, since articulating, systematizing and socializing these micro-stories are the starting point to develop a useful tool for those designers who decide to undertake in the future can achieve a performance more efficient inter-actor with the other members of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

1. Mimicry and / or elimination of the value of design in the budget: The low degree of institutional legitimacy that our profession has, the low appreciation that exists by many of the clients and the negative connotation that design has in a large part of society, which considers it an «easy» discipline with respect to engineering or architecture (Bonsiepe 2013), are some of the aspects that make it difficult to assign a value to that service. This leads to the value of the design being “camouflaged” within the final budget (it is added in the form of inputs or raw materials, which seems to be more widely accepted by customers), but at the same time it is precisely attentive to the possibility of achieving strengthening of design as a necessary and valuable resource for the creation of value. The economic dimension also operates in this sense, a large part of the interviewees agree that not charging for the design and preparation of projects (budgets), becomes the way to be competitive against other competitors with a greater trajectory than due to economies scale manage to reduce their costs and consequently the final price of their products.

2. Fortuitous obtaining of raw material: Far from the concept of “Blue Economy” proposed by the Belgian economist Gunter Pauli, there is another line of self-proclaimed “sustainable” ventures that generate products focused on the generation of symbolic value from the reuse of discarded material, which in addition to not having a significant impact in terms of sustainability if its real life cycle is analyzed, has the problem that the source of obtaining raw material with which they are carried out, is usually variable, irregular and They can even disappear and be interrupted for various reasons, putting the business model of the venture at risk.

3. Personalization of processes: It is known that all product innovation tends to have as a subsequent consequence an innovation in processes. This entails certain complexity since

if a supplier capable of manufacturing the product cannot be accessed, the designer usually becomes a self-producer. This leads to the professional relegating time from design tasks and becoming “manufacturer by default”.

4. Link support, resource network and loss of notion of fixed and variable costs: For example, due to the use of a workspace or machinery provided by a member of the entrepreneur’s link network (family, friends, etc.), the realization by the entrepreneur of some processes (productive, communicative, logistical, etc.) that are rejected by the mere fact of doing them on their own (not considering their own salary), etc.

5. Mechanical translation of products that worked in other markets: It usually happens that designers uncritically transfer certain types of products that have been commercially successful in other markets and seek to develop them in contexts with other codes of significance.

6. Typological hybridization of products: A common error when proposing new products is that the type of product offered is not clear, which creates a barrier to acceptance by users and even potential investors. Regardless of the degree of innovation, the product typology must be able to be synthesized in a clear and easy-to-communicate concept.

7. Lag between the design objectives and the client’s objectives: Especially in the early stage, professionals experience a certain idealism / moral design, which we find difficult to abandon. We seek that reality adapts to design and not vice versa, and an endless circle of redesigns and product improvements is carried out that, far from professionalizing the enterprise, wear it out and usually result in products that are out of date on the market. In other words, it is important to incorporate the notion of “minimum viable product” and that the improvements are the result of real feedback from users.

In sum, we hope that these examples serve to encourage each entrepreneur to share their experiences and build in this way an alternative discourse that is not simply successful and individualistic and even be able to share those projects that have not materialized and on which they can reflect. in pursuit of future improvements.

Finally, detect that the origin of all self-deception is based on the economic variable. That is to say, they respond to strategies that the entrepreneur seeks to save resources, which, although they are perceived as comparative advantages, result in a vicious circle of de-professionalization and labor informality that threatens the entrepreneurship itself, with which it is essential to make decisions to medium term, and establish networks with actors (public or private) that can leverage our projects.

References

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