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Innovation through craft

[Note that this proposed session is based on research published by the Crafts Council in 2016 and is therefore not a new research paper that could be published in the MF journal.]

Innovation through craft is nothing new. Across material disciplines, craft processes have always driven breakthroughs that have passed into other fields. What David Pye (1968) called 'the workmanship of risk' – the skilled manipulation of material that affords unplanned breakthroughs – is an enduring characteristic of craft that gives it its innovative edge.

Today we see this applied in such diverse fields as digital technology, aerospace and bioscience and in examples such as an embroiderer collaborating with a roboticist to develop wearable sensors for medical and sports applications.

This session will focus on examples of the innovations generated by these collaborations, how they occur and how we can make the most of their economic potential. The session will draw on KPMG's 2016 report for the Crafts Council *Innovation through Craft: Opportunities for growth*. The study sought to better understand the extent to which collaboration and innovation take place in, and through, craft and, importantly, what barriers need to be overcome to achieve the potential economic opportunities from it.

What do we mean by innovation through craft? Innovation in craft refers to evolution of technique, discovery of new materials, and application of new tools. Innovation through craft refers to makers facilitating or catalysing innovation elsewhere. It concerns the spillover effects of craft into other industries, which are explored in this study.

Recent years have witnessed acceleration in collaborative open innovation and a transformation in making, whose scale of impact is conveyed by the label, 'the fourth industrial revolution'. Alongside this, UK governments have given increasing attention to the creative industries' considerable economic contribution, as reflected in the UK Creative Industries Council's strategy, and the Government's *Industrial Strategy Green Paper (2017)*. In addition, 'fusion' – the combination of creative, technological and enterprise mindsets – has been identified as a key driver for successful businesses. Fusion is enabled by collaboration across sectors, as the examples in this report demonstrate.

This session will explore the barriers and potential successes of craft innovation through KPMG's contemporary case studies. These provide deeper insights into the value of craft innovation and collaboration to the UK economy and the challenges faced. The contribution will describe how most innovation through craft currently happens through happy accident and what we need to move, via strategically-focused investment and the actions identified by KPMG, to an established culture of open innovation and collaboration. The potential economic and social rewards are great, including the development of new products and services, new ways of working and access to new global markets.

References

Creative Industries Council. 2016. *Create Together*. London: Creative Industries Council
HM Government. 2017. *Building our Industrial Strategy: green paper*. London: HMSO.
Pye D., 1968. *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*. Cambridge University Press