

IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING LIFE SKILLS AND SOFT SKILLS TO GEN ZS IN DESIGN EDUCATION AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

Abstract

The workforce is witnessing a gradual rise in the portion of Generation Z (Gen Z) individuals. This demographic shift is prompting organizations to recognize the forthcoming difficulty in retaining these individuals (Dolot, 2018). In response, higher education institutions must reconsider their teaching and learning approaches to strengthen the development of essential soft skills that employers increasingly require. Presently, a noticeable gap exists, with recent graduates lacking the very soft skills that employers highly prioritize for immediate job readiness. The challenges faced by Generation Z are distinct, owing to the unique context of their upbringing in a rapidly evolving world. These challenges are influencing various aspects of their lives, including behaviour, personal growth, education, career decisions, and overall well-being. Introducing life skills and soft skills training within undergraduate curricula acknowledges the diverse requirements of Gen Z students. This equips them to excel in a swiftly changing global landscape, enabling them to positively engage with the array of challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. This paradigm shift has the potential to deliver valuable insights to stakeholders within the realm of higher education,

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, a notable shift in the workforce landscape has become evident, driven by the gradual integration of Generation Z (Gen Z) individuals, encompassing those born from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s. This demographic transition has induced organizations to proactively anticipate the challenge of retaining and effectively engaging this cohort within professional spheres (Dolot, 2018). Concurrently, educational institutions in higher learning are grappling with the compelling need to adapt their pedagogical approaches, ensuring that Gen Z students acquire the essential soft skills that contemporary employers highly value. Nonetheless, there is an evident difference, revealing a prominent gap between the skill sets possessed by recent graduates and those which are vitally important and required for immediate job market readiness.

Within the context of an era characterized by rapid global metamorphosis, Generation Z confronts a distinctive set of challenges, molded by their upbringing during this transformative period. These challenges have exerted a profound impact over various dimensions of their lives, spanning behavioral nuances, personal maturation, educational pursuits, vocational aspirations, and holistic well-being. As a result, a compelling imperative has emerged, necessitating the infusion of training in life skills and soft skills into the pedagogy of undergraduate education. This pedagogical evolution not only acknowledges the intricate array of requisites ingrained to Gen Z students but also empowers to efficiently and skillfully navigate a swiftly evolving work environment. Furthermore, it equips them to meaningfully contribute to the kaleidoscope of challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

This study embarks on a comprehensive exploration of these interwoven dynamics, along with providing valuable insights for stakeholders within the sphere of higher education. By providing cognizance into the potential consequences of adapting educational paradigms to cater to the peculiar distinguishing needs of Generation Z, this study aims to provide invaluable perspectives to guide the strategic determinations and policy formulations of higher education institutions.

II. THE EVOLVING WORKFORCE LANDSCAPES.

The present times as well as the future scenario is very strongly influenced as well as expected to be strongly influenced by technological innovation. The major factors that impact the workforce landscape are-

- Technological progress,
- The Demographic, social and environmental changes,
- Globalization and Glocalization
- Labor/ workforce Flexibility.

In a highly competitive job market, possessing technical skills alone is often not sufficient. Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving are highly sought after by employers. Gen Z students who graduate with a strong foundation in these skills are better equipped to secure jobs and thrive in their careers. The employers

therefore seek the following qualities/ traits in employees to sustain as well as grow in this dynamic and competitive market scenario.

- 1. Adaptability:** The design industry is continuously evolving at an unprecedented pace, with new technologies and trends emerging regularly. due to technological advancements and changing trends. Gen Z students need to be equipped with adaptability skills to stay relevant throughout their careers. Soft skills such as flexibility, resilience, and openness to learning enable them to navigate these changes effectively.
- 2. Effective Collaboration:** Design projects often involve interdisciplinary collaboration, requiring students to work with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Soft skills like teamwork, communication, active listening and empathy are essential for effective collaboration and working harmoniously within diverse groups. By developing these skills early, Gen Z students can contribute meaningfully to projects, bridge gaps in understanding, and bring fresh perspectives to the table.
- 3. Effective Communication:** Designers often need to collaborate with clients, colleagues, and stakeholders to bring their ideas to life. Proficient communication skills help Gen Z designers articulate their concepts, receive feedback, and collaborate seamlessly. This includes not only verbal communication but also written and visual communication skills like visual presentation, and storytelling to articulate their visions effectively.
- 4. Creative Problem-Solving:** Design is all about solving problems creatively. Life skills such as critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem-solving are fundamental to the design process. These analytical skills allow Gen Z students to approach design challenges with innovative solutions. These skills are also applicable to various aspects of life and work.
- 5. Empathy:** Empathy is a crucial skill in design as it helps designers understand users' needs and create solutions that resonate with them. Teaching empathy and encouraging a user-centric approach from an early stage prepares Gen Z students to create designs that have a meaningful impact on people's lives.
- 6. Time Management:** Balancing work, projects and personal commitments requires effective time management. Teaching Gen Z students how to prioritize tasks, set goals, and manage their time enhances their productivity and reduces stress.
- 7. Leadership:** Design projects often involve teamwork and leadership roles. Soft skills like leadership, teamwork, conflict resolution, and negotiation empower Gen Z students to lead and contribute effectively to multidisciplinary teams. Developing leadership skills is essential for Gen Z students who aspire to take on managerial roles in the future. Soft skills like decision-making, and emotional intelligence are vital for effective leadership. These skills enable them to lead teams, make informed decisions, and foster a positive work environment.
- 8. Client and User Interaction:** Designers often need to work closely with clients and end-users to understand their needs and preferences. Effective communication, active

listening, and empathy are soft skills that enable designers to gather accurate insights and create solutions that meet user requirements. Effective interpersonal skills are essential when presenting design concepts, gathering feedback, and building relationships with clients. Developing these skills during their undergraduate years can make Gen Z designers more client friendly.

9. **Cultural Awareness and Diversity:** Designers often work on projects that cater to diverse audiences and cultural contexts. Teaching cultural awareness and diversity fosters inclusivity in design, enabling Gen Z students to create designs that are sensitive and relevant to various communities.
10. **Networking and Professionalism:** Soft skills like networking, professionalism, and etiquette are essential for building a successful career in design. Gen Z students therefore need to know how to present themselves, build professional relationships, and navigate industry events.
11. **Ethics:** Design decisions have far-reaching ethical implications. Teaching life skills such as ethical reasoning and social responsibility helps Gen Z designers consider the broader impact of their work on society, the environment, and various stakeholder.

III. GEN Z: TRAITS, PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES

1. **Traits of Gen z at Undergraduate Design Study Level :** Generation Z (Gen Z), born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, exhibits certain distinct characteristics that are important to consider when teaching them at the undergraduate design study level. While individual traits can vary, there are some common characteristics that tend to define this generation:
2. **Positive Attributes of Gen Z:** Generation Z (Gen Z) has a range of positive attributes and strengths which make them a unique generation. These qualities equip them to address contemporary challenges and contribute positively to society. Some of the key plus points of Gen Z include:
 - **Digital Natives:** Gen Z's are very comfortable with technology and digital tools and they can quickly adapt to new platforms, innovate, and excel in tech-driven environments.
 - **Diverse and Inclusive:** Gen Z values diversity and inclusivity. They willingly embrace different cultures, perspectives, and identities. This outlook contributes to greater social harmony and understanding.
 - **Entrepreneurial Mindset:** Gen Zs are entrepreneurial and innovative, eager to create their own opportunities and challenge traditional norms. This can lead to a culture of innovation and fresh approaches to problem-solving.
 - **Social Consciousness:** Gen Z is socially conscious and passionate about social justice, equality, and environmental issues. Their activism can lead to meaningful change and advocacy for important causes.

- **Global Perspective:** Gen Z has a global perspective and a deeper understanding of international issues. This global awareness can lead to greater empathy and cross-cultural competence.
- **Creative:** Gen Zs are creative and have the ability to express themselves through various mediums, from visual arts to digital content creation. This creativity contributes to a dynamic cultural landscape.
- **Adaptability:** Gen Z is adept at adapting to change and embracing new ideas, technologies, and challenges. This flexibility is an asset in a rapidly evolving world.
- **Collaborative:** Gen Z values collaboration and teamwork, making them adept at working in diverse groups and leveraging collective intelligence.
- **Tech-Savvy Problem Solvers:** Their familiarity with technology allows Gen Z to find innovative solutions to complex problems, often utilizing digital tools and online resources.
- **Multitasking and Efficiency:** Gen Z's multitasking abilities and efficiency in managing multiple digital platforms can lead to productivity in various aspects of their lives.
- **Critical Thinkers:** Gen Z's exposure to vast amounts of information encourages them to think critically and evaluate sources, which is crucial in a world with abundant data.
- **Financial Sensibility:** Gen Zs value financial stability. They seek to make informed financial decisions and prioritize financial literacy.
- **Self-Driven Learning:** Gen Z is comfortable with self-directed learning and seeks information and skills independently, often using online resources and courses.
- **Social Media and Marketing Savvy:** Their familiarity with social media and digital marketing tools makes Gen Z adept at leveraging these platforms for personal branding and communication.
- **Desire for Impactful Careers:** Gen Z often prioritizes careers that have a positive impact on society and the environment, leading to a focus on purpose-driven work.

These positive attributes of Gen Z offer a hopeful perspective for their ability to contribute positively to the world. Recognizing and nurturing these strengths can help them navigate challenges and thrive in their personal and professional lives.

3. Negative Traits of Gen Z: While Generation Z (Gen Z) possesses numerous strengths and positive traits, like any generation, they also exhibit certain shortcomings and challenges. However, Individual differences vary within any generation, and not everyone in Gen Z will share these shortcomings. Here are some potential shortcomings associated with Gen Z:

- **Short Attention Span:** Gen Zs are exposed to quick and constant information through digital devices. This leads to shorter attention spans, which might impact their ability to focus on complex tasks for extended periods.
- **Technology dependent:** Gen Z's heavily rely on technology and this can sometimes limit their ability to work in situations without any digital assistance.
- **Lack of Face-to-Face Communication Skills:** Gen Zs communication channel is through screens and text messages. This has a diverse impact on their ability to

engage effectively in face-to-face conversations, including reading nonverbal cues and conveying empathy.

- **Impatience:** Because of the fast-paced nature of their digital lives, Gen Z desires instant gratification, and they become impatient and lose interest with tasks that are gradually slow.
- **Handling Criticism:** Gen Z's are constantly exposed to positive reinforcement through social media and the desire for "likes" while on it. This makes it difficult for them to handle criticism and constructive feedback.
- **Loneliness and Isolation:** Gen Zs are heavily into online interactions and this leads to feelings of isolation and disconnectedness.
- **Information Overload:** Gen Z has grown up in an era of abundant information, but sorting through this information and discerning credible sources is challenging for them.
- **Validation:** The prevalence of social media has led to an exaggerated emphasis on constant external validation, where they assess their self-worth with likes, shares, and comments. They become impatient if they receive fewer or no responses.
- **Anxiety:** Extra exposure to social media leads to unhealthy comparisons and contributes to anxiety and low self-esteem among Gen Zs.
- **Traditional Skill Gaps:** Gen Z faces gaps in traditional skills like cursive writing, analog problem-solving, and basic life skills due to the digital-focused environment they've grown up in and also because of the rapid growth of technology,
- **Desire for Instant Expertise:** Easy access to online tutorials and information leads to an expectation of instant expertise, which compromises on the value of practice and patience in mastering skills.
- **Uncertainty About the Future:** Gen Z has witnessed rapid changes in technology, economics, and the job market, which has led to uncertainty and anxiety about their future prospects.

It's important to approach these potential shortcomings with empathy and understanding. Gen Z's strengths and weaknesses are shaped by the unique digital landscape they've grown up in. Addressing these challenges through education, mentorship, and guidance can help them develop a balanced set of skills and traits for a successful and fulfilling future.

4. Challenges faced by Gen Z: Generation Z (Gen Z) faces a variety of challenges that are unique to their generation and the changing world they've grown up in. These challenges can impact their personal development, education, career choices, and overall well-being. Some of the key challenges faced by Gen Z include:

- **Digital Dependency:** Gen Z is the first generation to have grown up in a fully digital world. While this offers advantages, it also leads to concerns about over-dependency on screens, social media, and technology, impacting their social interactions, mental health, and attention spans.
- **Mental Health Issues:** Gen Z faces high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression because of factors like academic pressure, social media comparison, cyberbullying, and uncertain futures.

- **Cyberbullying:** The prevalence of online interactions exposes Gen Z to potential risks such as cyberbullying, online predators, and exposure to inappropriate content.
- **Educational Pressure:** The competitive nature of education systems can lead to stress, burnout, and a focus on rote learning instead of holistic understanding.
- **Economic Uncertainty:** Many Gen Z individuals are entering the workforce during times of economic instability and job market shifts, making it challenging to secure stable employment and plan for their financial future.
- **Student Debt:** Higher education costs have risen significantly, resulting in substantial student debt burdens for many Gen Z individuals. Managing student loans and making informed financial decisions becomes a priority.
- **Climate Change Concerns:** Gen Z is acutely aware of environmental challenges, such as climate change and sustainability issues and they feel a responsibility to address these concerns, which in turn can lead to anxiety about the future.
- **Changing Career Landscape:** The rapidly evolving job market requires Gen Z to be adaptable and continuously update their skills.
- **Globalization and Diversity:** Gen Z is growing up in a globalized world with increased exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives. While this can be enriching, it also presents challenges related to understanding and respecting different viewpoints.
- **Political Polarization:** Gen Z in the current scenario is witnessing heightened political polarization and divisive discourse. Navigating these complex political issues can be challenging and can impact their sense of civic engagement.
- **Access to Reliable Information:** The abundance of information on the internet makes it challenging to discern reliable information from misinformation.
- **Social Justice and Activism:** Gen Z is passionate about social justice and equality issues. While this activism is empowering, it can also be emotionally taxing as they confront systemic problems and work toward change.
- **Traditional Pathways vs. Entrepreneurship:** Balancing traditional career pathways with the desire for entrepreneurial ventures is a challenge for Gen Z individuals.
- **Work-Life Balance:** The constant connectivity and expectations of being available 24/7 blurs the lines between work and personal life thus impacting their ability to achieve a healthy work-life balance.

Providing guidance, mentorship, mental health resources, and opportunities for skill development can empower them to overcome these challenges and thrive in this rapidly changing world.

IV. EQUIPPING GEN Z FOR TRANSFORMATIVE WORLD - PEDAGOGICAL PARADIGM SHIFT IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

Life skills and soft skills are two distinct but closely related sets of abilities that individuals need to navigate various aspects of their lives, both personally and professionally. While they have some overlap, they serve different purposes and are essential for different contexts.

Life skills are the practical and psychological abilities that individuals need to manage the challenges and responsibilities of daily life. These skills enable people to make informed

decisions, solve problems, and effectively deal with various situations. Life skills are often associated with personal development, independence, and self-reliance. Some common examples of life skills include:

- **Time Management:** The ability to prioritize tasks, manage schedules, and allocate time efficiently to accomplish goals.
- **Decision-Making:** Making informed choices by evaluating options, considering consequences, and understanding potential outcomes.
- **Problem-Solving:** Identifying issues, analyzing possible solutions, and choosing the best course of action to address challenges.
- **Critical Thinking:** Evaluating information objectively, recognizing biases, and drawing logical conclusions.
- **Communication:** Expressing thoughts, ideas, and feelings clearly and effectively to others.
- **Stress Management:** Coping with stress, anxiety, and pressure in healthy ways to maintain emotional well-being.
- **Financial Literacy:** Understanding personal finances, budgeting, saving, investing, and making responsible financial decisions.
- **Adaptability:** Being open to change, adjusting to new situations, and learning from experiences.
- **Health and Wellness:** Practicing self-care, maintaining physical and mental health, and adopting healthy lifestyle habits.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Respecting and understanding different cultural perspectives, beliefs, and practices.

Soft Skills: Soft skills are interpersonal and communication abilities that enable individuals to interact effectively with others in various social and professional contexts. These skills are essential for building relationships, collaborating, and working harmoniously within teams. Soft skills are often sought after by employers as they contribute to a positive work environment and successful outcomes. Some common examples of soft skills include:

- **Communication:** Expressing ideas clearly, actively listening, and tailoring messages to different audiences.
- **Teamwork:** Collaborating with others, sharing responsibilities, and contributing to group goals.
- **Leadership:** Guiding, motivating, and inspiring others to achieve shared objectives.
- **Problem-Solving:** Analyzing challenges, brainstorming solutions, and working collaboratively to address issues.
- **Adaptability:** Embracing change, remaining flexible, and adjusting to new circumstances.
- **Creativity:** Thinking innovatively, generating new ideas, and approaching tasks from unique angles.
- **Empathy:** Understanding and considering others' feelings, perspectives, and needs.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Resolving disagreements, negotiating solutions, and maintaining positive relationships.

- **Time Management:** Efficiently managing tasks and deadlines while balancing competing priorities.
- **Negotiation:** Reaching agreements that benefit all parties involved and involve compromise.
- In summary, life skills focus on personal development and managing various aspects of life, while soft skills emphasize interpersonal abilities that enable effective communication, collaboration, and interaction with others. Both sets of skills are essential for individuals to succeed in their personal lives, academic pursuits, careers, and social interactions.

Teaching life skills and soft skills to Generation Z (Gen Z) students in undergraduate design education is of paramount importance in preparing them for success in both their careers and personal lives. While technical skills and design principles are essential for success in the field, incorporating life skills and soft skills into the curriculum like critical thinking, problem-solving, time management, adaptability, effective communication, teamwork, and empathy can significantly enhance the overall educational experience by making it more holistic and prepare students for a rapidly changing and dynamic world.

Incorporating life skills and soft skills into undergraduate design education might involve various teaching methods, such as project-based learning, role-playing, group discussions, workshops, and internships. Providing students with opportunities to practice and refine these skills in real-world scenarios is essential for their growth.

Teaching life skills and soft skills in creative and engaging ways can enhance students' learning experiences and help them develop these important abilities more effectively. Following are some creative methods to incorporate these skills into our pedagogy:

- **Role-Playing Scenarios:** Create real-life scenarios that require students to use problem-solving, communication, and empathy skills to navigate challenges. For example, simulate a customer service interaction or a conflict resolution scenario.
- **Interactive Workshops:** Organize workshops focused on specific soft skills, such as active listening, negotiation, or time management. Use interactive activities, group discussions, and real-world examples to reinforce these skills.
- **Project-Based Learning:** Design projects that require collaboration, decision-making, and creative thinking. Students can work in teams to tackle complex problems, encouraging them to use a variety of soft skills.
- **Storytelling and Reflection:** Use storytelling to convey the importance of life skills and soft skills. Share personal anecdotes or real-world examples that highlight how these skills have made a difference. Then, encourage students to reflect on their own experiences.
- **Guest Speakers:** Invite guest speakers from various professions to share their insights on the importance of soft skills in their careers. This provides real-world context and exposes students to diverse perspectives.
- **Game-Based Learning:** Introduce educational games that require strategic thinking, teamwork, and decision-making. These games can be both fun and effective in teaching important skills.

- **Simulations:** Use virtual simulations to immerse students in scenarios that require them to use their soft skills. For example, simulate a business negotiation or a medical consultation.
- **Peer Mentorship:** Pair older students who have developed strong life skills and soft skills with younger students. This creates a supportive environment for learning from peers.
- **Art and Creativity:** Integrate artistic activities like drawing, writing, or drama into lessons about emotions, empathy, and communication. These activities can provide unique ways to explore and express these skills.
- **Community Service Projects:** Engage students in community service projects that require teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving. This allows them to apply their skills in real-world contexts.
- **Technology Integration:** Use educational apps, online platforms, or virtual reality experiences to teach and practice soft skills in innovative ways.
- **Debates and Discussions:** Organize debates on relevant ethical topics to encourage critical thinking and persuasive communication.
- **Multidisciplinary Projects:** Collaborate with other teachers to create projects that involve multiple subjects, requiring students to integrate their skills across different areas.
- **Cultural Immersion:** Explore cultural differences in communication, teamwork, and problem-solving to enhance students' cross-cultural skills and global awareness.
- **Self-Assessment and Feedback:** Have students assess their own skills and set goals for improvement. Provide constructive feedback and encourage them to reflect on their progress.

Creativity in teaching involves adapting methods to suit your students' learning styles and the subject matter. Mentors and Teachers need to make learning about life skills and soft skills engaging, relevant, and applicable to real-life situations.

1. **Courses That Can Teach Life Skills and Soft Skills in Design Education:** Integrating courses that specifically teach life skills and soft skills within design education can greatly enhance students' overall learning experience and prepare them for successful careers in the field. The following are some courses that can be designed to teach these skills in the context of design education:

- **Design Thinking and Problem Solving:** This course can focus on teaching students how to approach design challenges using the principles of design thinking. It emphasizes empathy, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration as they work to solve real-world problems.
- **Communication and Presentation Skills for Designers:** In this course, students can learn how to effectively communicate their design ideas to clients, teams, and stakeholders. It covers techniques for visual communication, storytelling, and delivering compelling presentations.
- **Teamwork and Collaboration in Design:** This course emphasizes the importance of teamwork and collaboration in the design process. Students can work on group projects that require them to communicate, delegate tasks, and manage conflicts within a design team.

- **Ethics and Social Responsibility in Design:** This course explores the ethical considerations in design, such as cultural sensitivity, sustainability, and the impact of design choices on society. This course can encourage students to develop a strong sense of social responsibility in their work.
- **Human Factors in Design:** This course focuses on understanding users' needs and perspectives, fostering empathy and emotional intelligence. Students learn how to design products and solutions that truly meet users' requirements.
- **Time and Project Management for Designers:** This course can equip students with skills in time management, prioritization, and project planning. It helps them balance multiple tasks, meet deadlines, and effectively manage their workload.
- **Portfolio Development:** This course guides students in creating a strong design portfolio and developing their personal brand. It covers self-promotion, online presence, and effective networking.
- **Design Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** This course focuses on the business aspects of design, teaching students about entrepreneurship, innovation, and the skills required to start and manage a design-related business.
- **Cultural Studies:** With an emphasis on diversity and cross-cultural behavior and communication, this course can help students understand how cultural differences can impact design and also how to design for a global audience.
- **Leadership and Design Management:** This course introduces leadership principles and management skills specific to the design field. It prepares students for roles where they may lead design teams or projects.
- **Critique and Feedback in Design:** Teaching students to give and receive constructive criticism is important. This course helps students develop effective critique skills and learn how to provide feedback that improves design work.
- **Design Psychology and Human Behavior:** This course delves into the psychological aspects of design, teaching students how to design with an understanding of how humans perceive and interact with their environment.
- **Visual Storytelling and Design Narrative:** This course emphasizes the power of storytelling in design. It helps students communicate their design concepts through compelling narratives and visuals.
- **Wellness and Stress Management for Designers:** Focusing on self-care and mental well-being, this course teaches students strategies to manage stress, maintain a healthy work-life balance, and stay creatively inspired.

By offering these specialized courses within a design education program, we can provide students with a comprehensive set of life skills and soft skills that are tailored to the demands of the design industry.

V. IMPLICATIONS AND INSIGHTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS

Design education has evolved beyond just technical proficiency. It now places significant emphasis on holistic skill development to address the complex challenges of the modern world. By embedding soft skills and life skills into our pedagogy, we can prepare Gen Z to confidently take responsibility and ownership of opportunities and help them to tackle the spectrum of challenges that they will encounter. Where Life skills like financial

literacy, decision-making, and stress management are fundamental for handling the responsibilities of adulthood, soft skills are equally vital, as they empower students to navigate complex situations, collaborate effectively with colleagues and clients, and adapt to rapidly changing industry trends. Design education is not just about acquiring knowledge during the undergraduate years; it's about instilling a passion for lifelong learning. Soft skills like self-motivation, curiosity, and a willingness to learn ensure that Gen Z designers continue to evolve and innovate throughout their careers.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, integrating life skills and soft skills into undergraduate design education equips Gen Z students with the tools they need to thrive both as designers and as individuals. By nurturing their personal development alongside technical expertise, educators can empower the next generation of designers to make a meaningful impact in their careers and society.

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