

# JOURNAL OF BUSINESS MODELS

CALL FOR PAPERS

## THE DESIGN OF BUSINESS MODELS

Special Issue: 10th Year Anniversary

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*'Engineering, medicine, business, architecture and painting are concerned not with the necessary but with the contingent - not with how things are but with how they might be - in short, with design... Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.'* - Herbert Simon<sup>1</sup>

### BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

We tend to take for granted that some things – buildings, products, and technologies – are designed. These things, or artefacts, are the product of human intention and action. They wouldn't exist if we didn't want them to exist.

We also take it self-evident that some professions, such as engineering or architecture, are about designing things. That engineers and architects are concerned with devising, shaping things, and, as Herbert Simon puts it, 'changing existing situations into preferred ones.' (Simon, 1996). And that disciplines such as engineering and architectures are fundamentally concerned with producing knowledge for action that would inform how to design things that ultimately "work" functionally, aesthetically, emotionally, etc. (e.g., McKim 1972; Shon, 1983)

But this is not how we have, in many instances, thought about business. However, things have changed considerably in recent times. The role of

design and designing is now increasingly seen as central to management, both in research, within practitioners-oriented publications and in practice (e.g., see Martin, 2009; Brown, 2009; Liedtka & Ogilvie, 2011; Liedtka, 2015; Auernhammer, 2020; Auernhammer and Roth, 2021).

The design of business models – the creative activity of designing business architectures, or parts of it, to solve business and human problems, at a profit (Business Design Lab, 2020) – is a central concern for entrepreneurs, managers and policymakers.

It is a central task for organisations and teams working on early-stage problems and ideas, the application of scientific discoveries and innovative and emerging technologies. For them, designing a scalable and viable business model represents the way to explore and eventually exploit a business opportunity by connecting an idea, technology or new knowledge in the form of scientific discovery to a

<sup>1</sup> Simon, H. (1996). *The Sciences of the Artificial* (3rd ed.). MIT Press, p. 111.

market and capturing value from it.

Business model design is also a concern for policymakers, visionary leaders and entrepreneurs interested in finding ways to address sustainability problems using markets. Companies and the private sector, in general, are great innovation engines. There is an excellent opportunity in unlocking such an innovation potential to contribute to sustainability. But doing it may require, *ceteris paribus*, to go beyond the ideas of mass organisation and production that have shaped the industrial economy and design more sustainable business models.

Strategists and managers in incumbent organisations are also concerned with business model design. A central task is to constantly innovate existing business models to thrive in the face of competitive threats coming from novel, sometimes game-changing value propositions and business models. And innovating existing business models is challenging. It pushes companies to go beyond what they are familiar with and what they know (Johnson, Christensen and Kagermann, 2008). It forces managers to become comfortable with tools, ways of organizing, the abilities, skills, human values and even mindsets that work well in an experimental – as opposed to a more deterministic – world (McGrath, 2010). In short, it pushes managers to embrace what designers do (Brown, 2009).

The need to better and more convincingly understand the intersection between business models AND design is also of primary importance for scholars. As research has progressively led to some form of agreement into what business models are (Teece, 2010; Baden-Fuller & Morgan, 2010; Massa, Tucci and Afuah, 2017), how to conceptualise them (e.g., Zott et al., 2011), what types and kinds are relevant for research (Remane, Hanelt, Tesch and Kolbe, 2017), or what distinguishes them from other constructs and concepts (Zott and Amit, 2013), new questions have started to be answered, many of which revolve around the business model design. These include insights on the role of experimentation, learning and discovery-driven processes (McGrath, 2010; Ghezzi and Cavallo, 2020; Taran, Boer and Nielsen, 2021), efforts to bridge business model research with the design literature (Amit and Zott, 2015; Zott and Amit, 2007; 2008), configurations (Leppänen, George and

Alexy, 2021) as well as work on the cognitive, communicative and coordinative value of visual representations of business models (e.g., Massa and Hacklin, 2020), to mention few.

### **Research Themes and Illustrative Questions for the proposed Special Issue**

Against the above background, this special issue of the Journal of Business Models invites contributions that seek to advance our understanding of business models AND design.

Possible guiding questions/topics include, but by no means are limited to, the following:

- What are the main dimensions/characteristics/attributes of designing, e.g., visual thinking, and how are these related to business models?
- How do entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial action lead to designing new business models??
- What are the similarities/differences between product, service or organisation design and business model design? What is the different between designing objects, artefacts, technologies and developing business models?
- What is the nature of the relationship between wicked problems and the design of a business model?
- What is the role of concepts and theories in/for design?
- How do design-related capabilities relate to learning in ambiguous and uncertain situations when the path to action is unclear?
- Which important theories/intellectual frameworks/concepts in the domain design can be used in relation to business model design? What are the main limitations?
- What antecedents and mechanisms are behind the design of business models, and how do they relate to designing and to designs (i.e., the output of the process involved in designing)?

Concerning the business model, we invite authors to clarify which interpretation of the business model they adopt:

- (1)** business models as attributes of actual firms,
- (2)** business models as cognitive/linguistic schemas (or dominant logics) and
- (3)** business models as formal, conceptual representations of how business functions (see Massa et al., 2017).

We welcome contributions focusing on each separately and/or in conjunction.

We also invite authors to explicitly distinguish between the reconfiguration of existing business models, the design of new business models within the boundaries of a current organization and business model design for start-ups not linked to any existing organisation (see Massa and Tucci, 2021).

Concerning design, we invite authors to consider the following: if the purpose of creation is, broadly speaking, to produce systems that do not yet exist, the purpose of a design science, including that one of the design of business (models), is to understand “what works” and produce knowledge which is field-tested and solution-oriented. In the words of Van Aken, the mission is to “develop knowledge that the professionals [...] can use to design solutions for their field problems. This mission can be compared to one of the ‘explanatory sciences’, like the natural sciences and sociology, which is to develop knowledge to describe, explain and predict.” (Van Aken, 2005; p. 20).

However, we also would like to drive the attention of scholars on the broader implications of design, understood as a philosophy deeply rooted in humanistic psychology theories, particularly creativity and human values as, for instance, illustrated by Auernhammer and Roth (2021) and reflect on its connection with innovation, as illustrated, for example, in the work of Roberto Verganti (e.g., Verganti, 2009).

Finally, a possible helpful distinction in terms of knowledge for business design is that one adopted by the Business Design Lab at Aalborg University. According to such a view, knowledge for business design includes at least three main areas:

- (1)** the methods, or processes, for design (how things are designed),
- (2)** the tools and knowledge supporting design (tools for business modelling and for making sense of new but also existing business models) and
- (3)** knowledge related to the role of the external environment or context in which design occurs, including theories that would help make sense of it.

### **Editorial plan**

In line with the Journal of Business Models editorial scope and with the objectives of this special issue, we will consider for the Special Issue only short papers. Short papers are approximately 3000 words and typically follow the structure: Introduction, methodological approach, results and discussion, further perspectives, and conclusions (See Table 1).

In addition, we will be considering different types of papers: conceptual, phenomenological, empirical or exploratory in nature. We particularly welcome pieces that are thought-provoking, challenge existing assumptions, bridge and elaborate on insights from seemingly distant disciplines and illuminate possible avenues for further study. We are open to submissions from complementary disciplines as long as the core contributions are framed in a way to be relevant for the business model and business/management community. We are particularly interested in papers that hold important implications for practice.

In line with the objectives of the Journal of Business Models, we intend to ensure a speedy review process, starting with a short proposal, and eventually moving into a full short paper to be reviewed.

## Papers

Papers will be subject to double blind peer-review process. This process will be rigorously performed according to the journal guidelines.

See also <https://journals.aau.dk/index.php/JOBM/about/>

Papers should be formatted according to the journal guidelines: <https://journals.aau.dk/index.php/JOBM/about/submissions#authorGuidelines>

See also Table 1

## Important Dates

- **March 15, 2023** - Full draft of paper due to the Journal of Business Models.
- **June 15, 2023** - Feedback to authors on full paper.
- **September 15, 2023** - Deadline for resubmission.
- **October 10, 2023** - End of process, Special issue being produced.

## Table 1 Short paper: General Guidelines

### Length

- max 3.000 words
- 2 figures or tables
- 25 references

### Identification (Article Title Page)

- Title (max 10 words)
- Abstract (max 150 words)
- Key words (3)
- Authors' names and affiliation
- Acknowledgements (max 30 words)

### Contents

- Introduction
- Methodological approach
- Key insights
- Discussion and conclusions
- References

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