

# IIDA

# 28

# INSIGHTS

**FROM INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE 28**

We all know it — change is inevitable.  
But how are we cultivating deeper  
knowledge that allows us to anticipate  
change and apply new strategies and ideas?



IIDA's Industry Roundtable was founded to challenge and expand our knowledge, and at IR28, we explored generational wisdom, the human effects of sensory design, and the future of designing for relationships (both human and not!)

We hope that you found plenty there to challenge you and provoke the stirrings of some big ideas. As a further prompt, we've compiled here **28 Insights from IR28** to share with you, grouped into four key themes. Read it in bits and pieces, or all at once. Come back to it. It is both a reminder of the time we spent together as the IR community, and an impetus to keep reaching for what's next, throughout the year.

Thank you for spending time with us — see you at IR29!

# Coherence

**01** **Coherence matters more** than how much sensory input we provide. Multi-sensory design only works when senses support one another, creating a coherent experience. When sound, light, texture, and movement compete, people feel unsettled even if they cannot explain why.

**02** Poor sensory design **quietly taxes human health over time**. Flat facades and generic environments create low-level stress in the brain that can degrade our health.

**03** **Cognitive decline is not inevitable** — and design has a role to play. Research shows that environments rich in social interaction, movement, and sensory coherence help the brain continue to adapt and grow. This is key as longevity increases.

**04** We have created a world that has outpaced our ability to live in it. This shows up as **constant urgency, cognitive overload**, and environments that ask people to adapt more than they are able. Our brains need environments that complement our senses and adapt themselves to us.

**05** **Trends alone do not matter**. We need to understand the conditions that the trends are creating for ourselves, our clients, and our future users. Adding that context allows us to make coherent decisions moving forward.

**06** Design is accelerating in meaningful ways through faster feedback, faster learning, and faster adaptation. This age of design could become known as **the acceleration generation**. How do we build in coherence as data and technology move faster?



# Identity

**07** The design industry needs to find common ground around the multiple new pathways for entering the workforce. **The profession is grappling with its identity.**

**08** **Identities are changing, and design must keep up.** Life stages are evolving and lasting longer, forcing design to support ever-changing roles and identities over time. Workers ages 65 to 74 are among the fastest-growing segment in employment, and that cohort is also among the largest going back to school. The built environment has to become a steward of human continuity.

**09** **Identify assumptions.** Where are we generalizing differences or similarities? (Intergenerational questions to ask: Is that necessarily true? What does [professionalism/integrity/success] look like for you?)

**10** **Generational identity is real.** Shared experiences lead to generational norms, which influence behaviors and attitudes. When different generations' norms don't align and go unspoken, we feel the friction.

**11** **Don't use demographics as a crutch.** They can be dangerous, leading us to make assumptions about how to design for people. But they're really just a snapshot. They tell us how many people exist at a particular place and moment in time, how their lives might unfold, but it's not a full picture. We can't mistake demographics for design answers.

**12** Age diversity is a negative when it comes to success, retention and innovation UNLESS employees can say "my age is not a hindrance career-wise or to having/expressing an opinion". When people can say my age is an asset, then the equation flips; **age diversity becomes an asset to the organization.**

**13** **Escaping your generational bubble is a conscious act.** We move through our careers with people of similar age groups. The same goes for our personal lives. It takes proactive effort to change that. In one study, 40% of people over the age of 50 said they had not had a single conversation at work with someone in Gen Z in the last year.

# Trust

**14** **Many people hesitate to ask for help at work**, because they don't trust they'll get a positive response. Across age groups, asking questions can feel risky. This leads to silence, stress, and missed opportunities to learn.

**15** **Trust matters to organizational success.** Employees of all ages must believe their organization cares about their needs and supports their growth.

**16** **Ambient unreality is more prevalent** than ever. It describes a persistent background condition in which people struggle to distinguish what is stable, trustworthy, and consequential from what is simulated, provisional, or constantly shifting. People keep working, buying, and planning — but with a constant sense that systems, rules, and truths could shift without warning.

**17** **The end of assumed value:** Design has been built on the assumption that people will keep showing up, paying, and tolerating friction because value is apparent. That's over. If something doesn't perceptibly improve someone's life, it is downgraded, paused, or canceled. People are constantly evaluating whether a space or product is earning its place in daily life. If it cannot save time, reduce cost, lower stress, or increase access, it will not be used, no matter how beautiful it is. Every space needs to matter even more. Every square foot should be flexible and adaptable.

**18** In the future, **spaces and products will need to have behavioral reputations.**



# Relationships

**19** Focusing on people and objects can cause us to forget that the space between the body and the wall is **where experience takes shape.**

**20** Each sensory experience links to the previous, creating a **relationship between our senses.**

**21** **Consider the built environment as a strategy for something more:** What we are designing, whether architecture, interiors, or product, is an interface between space and the body, and ultimately the brain. So how can we create more opportunities to influence brain health, longevity, human connection, and more?

**22** **Relationship-centered design is the future.** Relationships have to become the primary unit of design. It's not just about aesthetics or outcomes, but relationships we're stewarding over time. The future of design is about stewarding the relationships people will have with spaces, products, and people as the world changes.

**23** **Environments and products will be judged on ongoing longevity relationships.**

**24** **How do we build a relationship with a place again?** Place attachment is on the decline. But it's important: place attachment can even impact climate change. Because when place is personal, climate change is no longer a distant reality.

**25** **Consider the “soul feeding” nature of space.** What feeds our souls? Creativity and sensory experience are linked to a “soul-feeding” joy that reminds us we are individual beings that matter.

**26** **Expand the pie.** Replace “us vs them” with “us plus them.” Generations need to collaborate, not compete. Replace perceptions of scarcity with integration and growth.

**27** **Stay curious, stay open, ask questions.** What are the opportunities we're missing by not being willing to learn from people both older and younger? Remember that asking for input shows respect. Nobody wants to be led by someone who thinks they know everything. Or who doesn't value their opinion. Ask younger colleagues how they would approach something, or how you as a leader could create a workplace where they would want to stay.

**28** **Explain the “why.”** Your workplace is your house, built over time. Younger generations tend to come in and push on the walls. Leaders' first inclination is often to be defensive. Certain walls in your industry or office are load-bearing; they cannot come down. The WHY has never been more important — explain to younger colleagues why certain things cannot change, and be willing to make changes when a process or practice is no longer serving anyone.

## Industry Roundtable 28 Attendees

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