

sustainable japan

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Designing from the Earth up: IDEO puts long term first

Roundtable

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In 1980, Steve Jobs asked a new design firm to develop a mouse for what would be one of the first personal computers to feature a graphical user interface, the Apple Lisa. The life span of this innovative desktop computer was short, but the legacy of its mouse design, which abandoned an expensive mechanism found in earlier mice in favor of a more easily manufactured component, can be seen in many of the mechanical mice used today.

The design firm behind the innovative mouse was David Kelley Design, the precursor of the innovation and design consulting firm IDEO, which was established in 1991 when designers David Kelley, Bill Moggridge and Mike Nuttal merged their companies. The firm has since expanded well beyond the scope of industrial product design, working on projects that encompass everything from health care to government and education.

Regardless of the field, central to IDEO's design philosophy is the notion of human-centered design, an approach to design that integrates the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success. In the 18th iteration of the Japan Times Sustainability Roundtable, host Ross Rowbury sat down with Amelia

Juhl, design director of IDEO Tokyo, to discuss human-centered design and its role in achieving sustainable solutions.

Skin care, kitchens, clean air

Juhl and IDEO have worked with various companies and organizations to innovate services and products in a wide array of fields, ranging from skin care products and agriculture to aerospace and futuristic kitchen tables. In 2015, IDEO worked with Ikea on a project to envision the future of the kitchen, which resulted in a prototype table that suggests recipes based on ingredients placed on its surface. IDEO Tokyo has also worked with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency on the Future Blue Sky project, a research and development project to reduce congestion and pollution and improve access to renewable energy.

As a design researcher, Juhl hones in on how people interact with a product or service. This interaction varies in complexity depending on the target of the design. "Initially, design was done by experts," she said. "A product designer would think about how to make a cup or chair beautiful. Then an engineer would come in and take away all the interesting bits so it could be scaled for manufacturing." Juhl explained that design researchers serve a different role, getting involved earlier in the process to talk to end users, or to all those who are touched by the designs, and identify aspects that can be improved. This is



Amelia Juhl, a design director at IDEO Tokyo. YUIKO TAIYA FOR PHOTOMATE

especially important when designing services, systems and businesses, she said: "With many people involved, the process of design allows us to bring people into the process in a way that serves all people."

It may seem like common sense for the creators of a product or service to reach out to end users, but this is not always the case, Juhl observed. She recalled how one of her clients, despite having many years of experience creating medical devices, had never actually spoken to the people using them. "When we had a kickoff, I asked the clients to put the medical device on themselves.

It was actually the first time the engineers had ever done that," she said. "Clients often don't have a direct connection with how their products are being used."

Distinguishing needs, desires

The next step in design is taking responsibility for the entire system in which a product or service is created, encompassing everything from the raw materials to the effects on workers, consumers and the planet, Juhl said. "We need to start thinking a little bit more about whether we're creating long-term health, to think about the

difference between needs and desires," she said. To illustrate this distinction, Juhl drew from her experience working on an agricultural project. "That project opened my eyes to our aging farming population, our unstable climate and the degradation of our soil and ecological health. What we are doing in agriculture is destabilizing our health in our bodies, and on land, for ourselves and generations to come."

Shortly after, Juhl worked on a technology project that she described as "technology for technology's sake." While acknowledging that these projects have value from a human desirability standpoint, she posited an often overlooked question: At what cost? "These require more infrastructure, more energy and more rare materials," she said. "Who are we leaving behind in this process? If you think about how all the economic gains we've had in the last few decades are concentrated on a few, and that half the world is living on \$5.50 a day, the thing we were working on starts to feel a little superfluous."

Juhl explained that designers, "knowing that it's so much easier to tap into our weakness, manufacture a need and capitalize on our willingness to pay," need to check themselves and ensure they are creating long-term health for communities and the planet, not just short-term happiness. Of course, this is easier said than done, as what is good for the planet often conflicts with the incentives of our economic structures. "We think we can't change any elements of the economy, but actually it's nature that we cannot change," she said. "We need to live in harmony with it."

Aligning with the planet

Design research emphasizes the act of speaking with end users to understand their needs. But what about planetary needs? Juhl observed that although we cannot speak to the planet, there are clear, intuitive planetary needs with which we



YUIKO TAIYA FOR PHOTOMATE

can align our decisions. To this end, Juhl is exploring how to incorporate tangible core sustainability principles into her conversations with clients. "For example, don't increase concentrations of synthetics into the biosphere faster than it can be naturally processed by the Earth, or don't destroy ecosystems or habitats faster than they can replenish themselves," she explained. "These are things you cannot violate, and they apply universally to any company."

The application of such principles necessitates organizational transformation, which must be spearheaded by bold leadership, Juhl said. "When you set a big goal, you're actually, as a leader, creating the space for creativity to flourish and providing permission for experimentation." She mentioned Unilever and Patagonia as examples of organizations that have demonstrated such bold organizational leadership. "As much as I would like to start this process, I cannot. It really needs to start with visionary, courageous leaders who commit to taking responsibility for their entire business system."



Roundtable is a monthly series of English-language events organized by The Japan Times Cube. For more information visit <https://sustainable-japan-times.com/roundtable>



Amelia brings more than 20 years of experience leading creative projects of all sizes, and moves comfortably from research to ideation, as well as strategy to execution.

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Times Gallery



Swiss President Ignazio Cassis (center) stands with MPower Partners general partner Kathy Matsui (solid dress), Switzerland Global Enterprise chairwoman Ruth Metzler-Arnold (print dress) and members of the SCCIJ Executive Committee at an SCCIJ luncheon on women's empowerment in Tokyo on April 19. ©AYAKO SUZUKI FOR SCCIJ



The ladies of the Tokyo Women's Club visit the Embassy of Mexico, where they were welcomed by Ambassador Melba Pria (first row, center) and learned about the history, culture and gastronomy of Mexico, as well as the status of Mexico-Japan relations. EMBASSY OF MEXICO



Albanian Ambassador Gjergj Tenexhiu hands over to Rep. Minoru Kiuchi a congratulatory letter from the chair of Albania's Foreign Affairs Committee, Mimi Kodheli. EMBASSY OF ALBANIA



The ambassador of Azerbaijan, Gursel Ismayilzade, and the chairperson and president of The Japan Times, Minako Suematsu, meet at the newspaper's offices on March 29. MARIANGELES DEJEAN



Jamaican Ambassador Shorna-Kay Richards with Masako Mori, special adviser to the prime minister for women's empowerment, who attended the opening of the embassy's exhibition on the contribution of Jamaican women to 60 years of nation-building, part of activities to celebrate Jamaica's 60th anniversary of independence this August. EMBASSY OF JAMAICA



Czech Ambassador Martin Tomco holds his first meeting with Czech honorary consuls and CCCIJ members. From left: Lukas Zicha, embassy consul; Masahiro Nomura, honorary consul in Sapporo; Tomco; Hidemitsu Inamine, honorary consul in Naha; Roman Watanabe, CCCIJ chairman; Atsushi Sasaki, CCCIJ executive director and Ondrej Svoboda. CCCIJ



To commemorate the 66th anniversary of the Independence Day of the Republic of Tunisia, the Embassy of Tunisia holds a reception on March 23, hosted by Ambassador Mohamen Eloumi (fourth from left). EMBASSY OF TUNISIA



A delegation headed by Raul Fornes (fourth from right), first vice president of the Cuban National Institute for Sports, Physical Education and Recreation, meets with members of the Dragons baseball team, which includes Cuban athletes. EMBASSY OF CUBA

Big goals: Soccer clubs work to revitalize their regions

Satoyama ~ Authentic Japan

MAIKO MURAOKA
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The sports industry was one of the first and foremost to suffer from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, and is not back to normal yet. Professional teams are accelerating efforts to recover with the arrival of spring, the beginning of a new season for many sports, not only for the survival of the teams themselves, but also for the revitalization of their home regions.

In the 22nd Satoyama Cafe, held on March 8 by the Sustainable Japan Network, run by The Japan Times, the leaders of two companies that manage professional soccer teams shared some examples of regional revitalization through sports and discussed what more is necessary. "The areas where soccer teams do nothing but play only soccer has ended" and "Diversity in human resources is a must" — these were views that both speakers shared in the talk session.

One of the speakers was Kenichiro Suzuki, the president of Suzuyo & Co., Ltd. and chairman of the S-Pulse soccer club, both based in the city of Shizuoka. Suzuyo was established in 1801 as a shipping agency in Shimizu harbor carrying rice, salt, general merchandise among others. Its business expanded to various other fields — including trading, construction, food, information technology, aviation and local development. It is important to remember that Suzuyo is "the first company in Japan to produce canned tuna and tubed mayonnaise and in recent years, it started providing flight services that connect rural areas with other rural areas," Suzuki said.

The other speaker was Fumiaki Koizumi, director and president of Mercari Inc., one of the leading online marketplace providers, and chief executive officer of Kashima Antlers F.C. Co. Ltd., based in Ibaraki Prefecture.

Suzuyo has been involved with S-Pulse for more than 20 years. "Our company owes much to this area in Shizuoka that nurtured our business, and supporting

S-Pulse has been one of our ways to pay back to the community, which has been suffering from the loss of population and liveliness, like any other rural area," Suzuki said.

The two-century-long relationship with various stakeholders in the area has enabled Suzuyo to provide support to the community beyond the stadium, such as turfing schoolyards and dispatching S-Pulse players and staff members to schools to give lectures.

Mercari does not have such deep roots in the city of Kashima, but possesses strength in speed and technology. The Antlers made their home stadium, Kashima Soccer Stadium, available to accommodate a drive-thru PCR testing center in May 2020. "The important thing is what the team can do in the face of a crisis," Koizumi said. During the pandemic, the Antlers launched a website to promote dozens of local shops and companies with links to their online shopping or home delivery pages and notified about 700,000 people who were registered with Antlers social media.

He also introduced experimental projects at the stadium, such as replacing all of the cutlery with biodegradable items and installing a face recognition system in collaboration with the team's partner companies. "We want to make our stadium a place where visitors can take a peek into the near future," he said.

Vacant spaces in the stadium are also one of their resources. "We opened a gym and an orthopedic clinic in the stadium, generating profit other than from soccer games," Koizumi said.

Suzuki also stressed the importance of increasing sales in areas other than soccer games and explained that the company is working on long-term plans to monetize various projects using the brand power of S-Pulse. "There are only 17 home



From left: Fumikai Koizumi, director and president of Mercari Inc.; Moderator Yuto Yoshida and Kenichiro Suzuki, president of Suzuyo & Co., Ltd. YUIKO TAIYA FOR PHOTOMATE

games annually. We should not rely only on those. Sports go well together with various other industries, such as technology, education, fashion and restaurants," Suzuki said, and then touched on the necessity of acquiring talent to expand the business realm. "Since last year, S-Pulse has been gathering talent such as those who are looking for a second job where they can utilize their experience in digital marketing," he said.

Koizumi pointed out that it has been customary for soccer teams to hire workers only through personal connections or from within the industry. "A closed industry has no diversity in human resources, which prevents the industry from growing," he said, and explained that the generation of himself and Suzuki, who are both in their 40s, is starting to take over leadership positions, contributing to enhancing diversity in the industry.

Koizumi went on to say that the Antlers aim to be a hub in the community and to figure out what they can offer for people's lifestyles, believing that profitability and stability will follow. Suzuki expressed his enthusiasm to make S-Pulse economically self-sustainable to continue contributing to the revitalization of its home region and the enhancement of civic pride.

This section highlights the environment and a sustainable society. For more information please visit www.sustainable.japantimes.com

