

TURNING THE TIDE

Guidelines for designers in a transitional environment

These guidelines are meant for designers focusing on experiential and brand experience design, specific target groups needs and aesthetic preferences, and designing according to the total touchpoint approach [3]. Simultaneously, this manifesto serves as a reminder for designers who are designing through Open Innovation and self-actualisation to check if they apply these guidelines regularly.

Have and spread empathy

The designer has empathy as an overarching skill. They should immerse themselves in the user's world to enlarge their understanding of the user's needs, feelings and behaviours. Besides having empathy for the user, designers play a key role in spreading empathy to other stakeholders, both in the context and in the designer's vicinity. People everywhere in the system are expected to have empathy for the end user, they are expected to take 1st [3, 6] perspective in the user's context so that societal transformation can be achieved. Because they already have experience in developing empathy for users, designers can help other stakeholders to practice empathy and also spread it, for example, through empathic handovers [5].

Reflect throughout the process

The designer uses a reflective design approach, which allows moving back or repeating steps. A linear design process does not allow for adding and processing knowledge into the current development of the design. More circular approaches, such as the reflective transformative design process (RTD), allow for knowledge gathering throughout the whole process [3]. Another option could be design thinking [2]. Both offer designers the opportunity to continuously reflect and improve on their process and thereby increase the value of their design.

Consider local & holistic view

The designer creates solutions for local context, but is constantly aware of (their effect on) big (societal) issues. Designers have the skills solve large problems such as food- and water shortage, poverty, energy and pollution [3], by creating local solutions together with local-context stakeholders from whom you can acquire local-specific knowledge of high data quality. However, knowing when to zoom into the local context or out to the systemic level is challenging. Switching between these views must come in an intentional rhythm, not as a (one-time) decision – as a response to the needs and signals of the design process. Zoom in when there is a need to deeply understand lived experiences, cultural nuances, or when solutions are not resonating on the ground—this helps ensure relevance, trust, and ethical alignment. On the other hand, zooming out is essential when local insights start to reveal broader patterns, root causes, or structural barriers, allowing the designer to address long-term, systemic change.

Communicate beyond the linguistic

Designers learn from parties that know their user and apply designerly communication skills. Designers should not just focus on the user, but also include credible knowledge experts who have deep local contextual (e.g. cultural, historical) insights about that user that can gain more in-depth understanding of the context and user needs. Also, designers' skills of compelling storytelling through visuals and tangibles can help to clarify a vague brief, so the problem can be fathomed, dissected, and clarified and can structurally be solved [3]. It helps stress the important information and ideas, keeps all stakeholders on the same page and may share and spread empathy for the end users. By doing this, the designer keeps the stakeholders together and guides them based on their own knowledge, expertise, needs and wishes.

Methods suggested to design for transformation [3]

Experiential Design labs (EDL)

Outside lab environment, users commit their usual behaviour. By creating a living lab or EDL – using sensors to gather data, analysing that by applying behaviour recognition algorithms – you can implement and test innovations and monitor readiness for transformation.

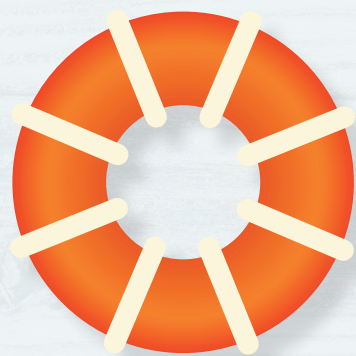
Cradle2cradle (C2C)

This methodology envisions materials as food, constantly travelling through different cycles and being reused, never going to waste. Designers must understand their responsibility of what happens to their product after it is discarded and apply this methodology to prevent contributing to more waste.

Platforms

Allowing a product's users to be involved and share knowledge, tips, and feedback over platforms is a great opportunity to enhance a design [3] and its user experience. Especially if these platforms have a high standard of quality and openness [4], customer satisfaction increases.

NOW YOU CAN...



Design for a transformation economy*, beyond self-interest and no longer as a problem-solver: you are the **facilitator of transformation**. With skills like deep empathy, reflective thinking and the ability to shift between local insights and systematic understanding, you have the ability to support value-exchange and create sustainable solutions for complex challenges that affect many, measured in impact. This way, you provide the world with design of **long-term societal impact**, designing not just *for* but *with* the users and stakeholders.

*In modern society, four economies are acknowledged [1]: industrial, experiential, knowledge and transformation economy. These have developed themselves along with the development of society, but the first three have created ways that cannot be sustained in our future. Therefore, systems must change and we must attune to the transformation of our world as we know it now. These guidelines can help designers to bridge the gap between innovation and society in the transformation economy.

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