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THE RESET ISSUE

Shortcut
to Everest
Resetting
Wall Street
Reset Your
Workforce
From the
Inside Out
You Don't
Need a
Crisis to
Press
the Reset
Button





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THE END OF UN SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

BY JAX WECHSLER

In their new book *The Upcycle*, authors Michael Braungart and William McDonough (of the influential *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*) suggest: "Human beings don't have a pollution problem; they have a design problem. If humans were to devise products, tools, furniture, homes, factories, and cities more intelligently from the start, they wouldn't even need to think in terms of waste, or contamination, or scarcity. Good design would allow for abundance, endless reuse, and pleasure."

Design-related decisions are happening everywhere on a daily basis, impacting "sustainable development" or provisioning for the needs of future generations of life on earth. Sustainability and design are intimately linked. Quite simply, our future is designed. The term "design" is here used to refer to practices applied to the making of products, services, as well as business and innovation strategy – all of which inform sustainability. How can design support more sustainable development?

Sustainability can be thought of as the property of continuance; that is, what is sustainable can be continued into the future. Sustainability is commonly considered in relation to three linked components: The economy, society, and the environment. For sustainable development, it is imperative that we think about value in not solely economic or financial terms, but also in relation to natural capital (the biosphere and earth's resources), social capital (the norms and networks that enable collective action), and human capital (the sum total of knowledge, experience, intellectual property, and labor available to

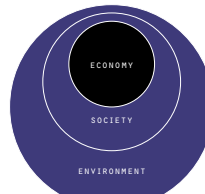
PHOTO: MICHAEL TIGER/ISTOCK

society). The purely economic capital so many people and organizations strive for, and make decisions by, are often not conducive to these alternative forms of capital. For sustainable development, there is a need to reset how we, as inhabitants of the earth, think about value.

Michael Porter and Mark R. Kramer talk about creating shared value, referring to business models that integrate societal improvements into economic value creation. For example, Nestlé worked closely with the farmers of the Moga Milk District in India, investing in local infrastructure and transferring world-class technology to build a competitive milk supply chain that simultaneously generated social benefits through improved healthcare, better education, and economic development. This value reset requires a paradigm shift, requiring systemic level transformation collectively enacted by governments, business, and everyday citizens alike.

Economic profitability is a powerful motivation for change, and lucky for the planet, sustainability can be profitable. A 2013 report from MIT Sloan Management Review and the Boston Consulting Group report the number of firms that profited from sustainability initiatives climbed to 37%, up 23% from the previous year, demonstrating that transforming business models is likely to lead to increased profits.

Sustainability is finally getting on the radar of the C-suite beyond their CSR strategies, and a growing number of companies today are moving from the design and creation of "things" to the design and delivery of "services." The service sector has become the major contributor of the worldwide economy, accounting for 73% of the UK's GDP, 70.5% of GDP in Europe, and 64% of GDP worldwide. This shift to a service economy supports sustainable development, as services generally rely on less natural capital and more human capital than



THE THREE COMPONENTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

products. With services, value is fundamentally derived and determined in use rather than through ownership, resulting in less stuff and usage of fewer resources. Pay per use type business models such as Zipcar and Airbnb are rising, supporting the sharing economy. Service innovation supports sustainable development as it helps firms to think about creating value rather than creating products, leading to the establishment of new business models and more sustainable offerings.

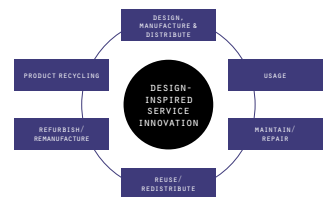
The circular economy is a fairly new economic framework that supports sustainable development. It poses a more profitable alternative to the traditional and linear take-make-dispose approach to the supply chain, and it's starting to gain traction globally. For example, China has recently integrated it into its government policy. In the UK, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation is building a program for 100 companies, including regions and emerging innovators, to begin unlocking the circular economy through collaboration and a review of legislation. Its founding principles are 1) waste is food, 2) diversity is strength, 3) reliance on renewable energy sources, and 4) systems thinking with its ability to understand how things influence one another within a whole. Systems thinking (and the circular economy) view problems as parts of an overall system. The circular economy privileges indirect causality, context, and relationships between components, and focuses on the cyclical rather than linear cause and effect. It brings a profitable economic model with a radical value reset.

Informed by cradle-to-cradle and systems thinking, the circular economy suggests that what you take you must put back. It seeks to rebuild capital, whether financial, manufactured, human, social, or natural. In a circular economy, the materials that sit within the

global economy that currently flow off the end of the conveyor belt can go back in; for example, designing a car for remanufacture, disassembly, and for de-compositionization. Within this model, designing long-lasting goods to be restorative will keep products and components in use for longer, whilst ensuring that biological materials can re-enter the biosphere at the end of their life, safeguarding soil productivity. Ultimately, the circular economy could decouple economic growth from resource consumption. From different financing of those products and materials to different business models, this approach brings a valuable economic framework that is compatible with sustainable design for our future.

The service economy, the notion of shared value, and the circular economy all resonate with design thinking, being human-centered, aspirational, visual, and collaborative. Firstly, design thinking can facilitate a rethinking of the value chain. Being human-centered and insight-driven, design thinking can help firms to think about customer value and reimagine the value chain with empathy. Organizations can now create through multiple perspectives, urge supporting firms and governments to consider shared value, and identify opportunities and collaborations between diverse global stakeholders. Beyond the traditional product life cycle, in what other ways could offerings and business models manifest and evolve? Design for service, prioritize shared value, and further the circular economy; These are only a few ways in which designers can be part of the sustainable solution, rather than continue to contribute to the problem. ///

Jax Wechsler is a human-centered design practitioner at Sticky Design Studio, and also teaches UX and design. She is based in Sydney, Australia.



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