

## Reflections on Don Norman's "Design for a better world"

### MEASURING USABILITY

Until a year ago, all the word USABILITY meant to me was the ease of use of software. I used to measure usability often using the 5Es (Effective, Efficient, Easy to Learn, Engaging, Error Tolerant,). One day I found myself in a spacious metro station in Athens where everything was wrong. The fact that I was in back pain, made me react emotionally.

### CAN YOU COMPLAIN ANOUT THE LACK OF USABILITY?

Now, all those involved in design, know very well that our decisions are heavily biased by emotion. The anger that I felt prompted me to take notes and photos of all the problems I spotted in this station. I wrote an article about it and I imagined that I would publish my observations in a "Usability Observatory" and that the authorities will respond immediately to correct all the problems and send me a thank you letter! Obviously I was wrong! There is no place to publish complaints! What was missing was not only a site for citizen complains, but I also needed a system for measuring usability of a complex system. Why measure? Well, as you know, if we can't measure, we can't manage!

### HOW CAN I MEASURE THE USABILITY OF A NON-SOFTWARE SYSTEM?

1 So I decided that the method of 5Es which measures the usability of software applications, could be applied to the evaluation of the metro station's usability or any other system using exactly the same criteria. Would it work? For me, YES. So I wrote an article about it and presented it to a mixed audience of scientists and artists. I got no comments at all, so I almost forgot about it for a long time. Insecurity creped in and I thought that I did not have the right to do this.

### THE INFLUENCE OF DON NORMAN

Then I read Don Norman's book "Design for a better World". As with his other books, Don stretched my mind, and reassured me that this could be done and should be done. He actually asks all designers to take a more energetic role in order to correct the situation, before it is too late.

### THE WORLD IS A MESS

The world is a mess. From collapsing social structures to the climate crisis, has been millennia in the making and can be traced back to the erroneous belief that the earth's resources are infinite. The key to change, says Don Norman, is human behavior, covered in the book's three major themes: meaning, sustainability, and humanity-centeredness. Emphasize quality of life, not monetary rewards; restructure how we live

to better protect the environment; and focus on all of humanity. Design for a Better World presents an eye-opening diagnosis of where we've gone wrong and a clear prescription for making things better.

### A NEW WAY OF THINKING

Norman proposes a new way of thinking, one that recognizes our place in a complex global system where even simple behaviors affect the entire world. He identifies the economic metrics that contribute to the harmful effects of commerce and manufacturing and proposes a recalibration of what we consider important in life

### DESIGN IS A HUMAN ACTIVITY

"Design is a human activity that has transformed the planet. Everything we see around us is artificial ... even the trees outside were "designed" by humans. That means everything was designed, but not necessarily by designers.

### DESIGN IS ONLY ABOUT SOFTWARE

Design is not only about software. Design is concerned with how things work, how they are controlled by humans, and the nature of the interaction between people and technology. When done well, the results are brilliant. But poor design can destroy the planet.

"Design for a better world" is about Meaningful, Sustainable, Humanity Centered design. Humanity-centered design builds on the principles of human-centered design, except it expands them. We must think about all living things and about the environment. We must realize we are part of a complex system, so what we do here can impact people all across the world and have a long effect.

### HOW MANY DESIGNERS ARE INVOLVED IN DELIVERING A PACKET

Take for example the task of shipping and delivering a packet from place A to place B. How many designers are responsible for the quick and efficient execution of this task?

1. Those who design the software to store the recipient's Name and Address
2. Those who design the software to guide the driver from A to B
3. Those who design and maintain the town's street labels
4. Those who design and maintain the house numbering on a street or square

### HUMAN ERROR OR DESIGNER'S FAULT

Any mistake in any of these systems, will create problems which have a direct impact on people's well-being (people get angry, frustrated,,,), on company's earnings (the courier, the town administration,...) , and finally on the planets climate change.

Does it sound extreme? My opinion is NO, and the reason is that all these mistakes make humans consume energy directly or indirectly (hours of driving, street congestion, accidents etc). Once the mistake is made, a chain reaction follows. If anything can go wrong, it will as Murphy says.

- IN A FEW WORDS....
- At its core, "Design for a Better World" urges us to reconsider our approach to design. It's not just about aesthetics or functionality; it's about the impact of design on people, society, and the environment.
- Norman argues that design can be a powerful force for positive change, and it should address complex global challenges like sustainability, social equity, and ethical considerations.
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## BOOK PRESENTATION

- "Design for a Better World" prompts us to think about the environmental impact of our designs. Sustainability should be a guiding principle, considering the entire lifecycle of a product or service.
- Ethical design further delves into the consequences of our creations, promoting transparency, accountability, and fairness in design choices.
- The book stresses the importance of inclusivity and accessibility. Design should not exclude anyone based on physical abilities, age, gender, or cultural background.
- Norman highlights that accessible design benefits everyone, creating products and environments that are user-friendly and accommodating to a diverse range of individuals.
- The book challenges us to think beyond isolated objects and consider the broader systems in which they exist.
- Norman encourages us to examine how our designs interact with larger ecosystems, influencing behaviors, cultures, and societies.
- As designers, we hold a remarkable power to shape the world. Norman urges us to embrace this responsibility with humility and a deep understanding of the implications of our creations.
- By prioritizing human needs, sustainability, inclusivity, and ethics, we can contribute to a world that is not just well-designed, but also more equitable, compassionate, and sustainable.
- In closing, "Design for a Better World" by Don Norman is a call to action for designers to step into a role that goes beyond aesthetics and functionality.

They must take seriously into account that the real issue today is human behavior. And that people are really good at responding to disaster, but they're not good at preventing it in the first place. That's the problem we face.

- Thank you for your attention. I'm open to any questions you might have about Don Norman's book or the concepts discussed today.