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DESIGNING FOR A *NOT SO* FLAT WORLD

In *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman defined the effect of globalization as flattening the world. However, his prescription focuses on the people who have adapted, or want to adapt, to the forces of globalization. What about those who are oblivious to or have only partially adapted to globalization?

What about the people who have retained their original ways despite globalization? We need a framework for designing for all the inhabitants of the global village, including those who live in a not-so-flat world.

A notion exists that believes designers can take their skills to new markets and transform people's lives using a magic wand. Some even think that the cultures left behind in the fast pace of modernization can only survive with help from the technologically, economically and intellectually advanced world. The truth, however, is different.

With enhanced access to new markets, designers will be increasingly designing for people they do not know. And to be successful, designers will need to understand the importance of cross-cultural and local influences on people's needs, wants and desires. **Design outputs, especially for unfamiliar markets, need to incorporate local concepts, traditions and expressions.** Additionally, new lifestyles emerging from the fusion of cross-cultural influences pose even greater challenges, as well as opportunities, for designers. These new circumstances will require new tools to help designers become familiar with the inhabitants of the emerging global village.

To understand how diverse the world is, consider David Smith's portrait of the world presented in his book *If the World Were a Village*. Smith reduces the planet's six billion people to a village of 100 and describes the nationalities, languages, education levels, economic conditions, etc., of its inhabitants (see sidebar). It is only by understanding and respecting the diverse sensibilities of the villagers that designers will be able to successfully bring innovation to the global village.

States of Mind

A global design framework will help designers and innovators understand the nuances that distinguish inhabitants of the global village. After all, the first step in any design process is knowing who you are designing for. A tool commonly used by the design community to understand the end user is persona. Personas can represent findings from design research, especially when imagining use scenarios

(past, present and aspired). The information used to define personas, such as users' contexts, goals, pain points and major issues from their environment that need to be resolved, is drawn from different sources.

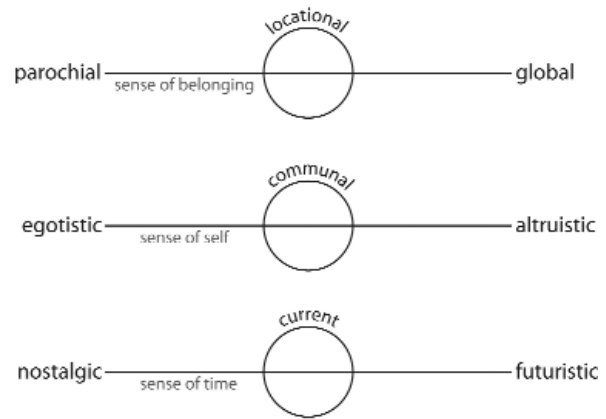
Though personas are fictitious, client companies often mistake them for real people who represent specific customer segments. It is common for organizations to conduct quantitative studies to identify exact numbers or proportions of personas in the real world and then go looking for them. However, quantitative segmentation of personas has the potential to alienate a significant portion of actual end users from the scope of a design strategy.

An alternate approach is the concept of states of mind, the emotional and cognitive conditions that guide people's preferences for products, brands, information and environments around which characters within design scenarios can be portrayed. A single individual can live for and aspire to multiple identities and multiple states of mind and seek experiences that satisfy the cravings of specific states of mind.

There are three significant dimensions along which states of mind can be profiled when trying to capture the influence of globalization on people's needs and aspirations: sense of belonging, sense of self and sense of time.

Sense of Belonging: People's desire to belong, or connect, influences who they interact with and how they choose to interact. On one hand, the desire to connect is defined by parochial considerations (top, right), and on the other by a sense of belonging to a global community. In between is a sense of location, a sense of connection to symbols and ideas that represent the city, town, village, state or the country where a person resides.

Sense of Self: People have a tacit need to define themselves in relation to the rest of the world and to project this identity before others. The need for a sense of self impacts how people express themselves through products, brands and environments. *In The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...and Why*, Richard Nisbett outlines distinct differences in Western and Eastern ways of thinking, "[Westerners] focus on objects

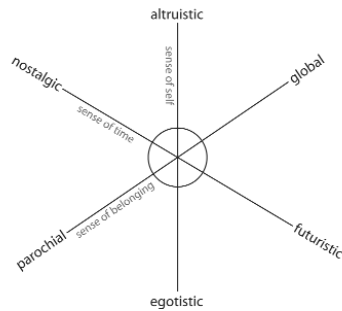


Sense of belonging ■ Sense of self ■ Sense of time

and their control, Asians on context and harmony; Westerners think linear and rhetorical, while Asians think holistic and relational; where Westerners see simplicity, logic and stability, Asians find complexity, paradox and change. These differences are clear but not stark, and bicultural experience tends to blend them."

The sense of self state of mind is inspired by Nisbett's proposition that there is a distinct difference in the cognitive makeup of people from different cultures. One end of the continuum refers to selfish desires (above, middle), the other end to altruistic aspirations. The middle zone refers to communal associations, where people derive a sense of self from their connection to a well-defined commune, such as a caste, tribe, religion, language or profession.

Sense of Time: People's experiences are influenced by their sense of the past, present and future. The time frame people want to experience at a given moment will determine what props, i.e., products, they choose to obtain a vicarious sense of that time. One end of this continuum refers to a sense of nostalgia (above, bottom), which may come from a desire to experience traditions, rituals, myths or just a feeling of the past. On the other end is a desire to imagine being a part of the future. The middle space refers to the desire to be in sync with the present—what is cool, trendy and pop-



ular. Knowing where people want to belong in time can help conceptualize an effective design strategy.

Global Design Framework

Combining these states of mind into a single framework can help designers understand their target consumers' desires when a product or brand is being used (above). Defining states of mind, associated motivations and use scenarios will produce compelling narratives that can inspire innovative ideas that are relevant to different mindsets at a global level. The diagram on the right uses examples of past and present designs to demonstrate how various states of mind fit within the framework.

I have found that verbal and observational research cannot adequately elicit the vital emotional and cognitive dimensions of people's states of mind. Instead, hands-on activities, such as cognitive mapping, collage making, day-in-a-life maps, scrapbooking, Velcro modeling, are more effective in getting people to reveal the tacit knowledge about their own experiences and aspirations. Such activities, by virtue of play-like engagement with the tools, enable the participants to tap into the implied aspects of their experience more easily, compared to verbal and written expression. These tools become modes of implicit communication between the end users and researchers. We typically ask people to focus on the moments of experience from their lives during which the products being designed would have a role. By understanding their emotional and



Mapping design ideas to the framework. Left to right: Khadi, the hand-spun cloth of India; Red, the new global initiative to help victims of AIDS in Africa; Prius, the hybrid car; Wikipedia; MySpace; iPod; the flag of the Third Reich; Volkswagen Beetle; and Vietnam Veteran's Memorial.

cognitive states during those moments, we are able to interpret their motivations and pain points. This information is then presented through a combination of visual illustrations and written descriptions as narratives that inspire ideas.

In the midst of globalization, when the need for cross-cultural understanding and collaboration is central to any global endeavor, designers need to become worldly-minded, learning to respect differences and identify the fusion of thoughts that result from the intermingling of people of diverse cultural origins. A global design framework can help the design community understand the extent to which their target audiences have been affected by globalization and the extent to which designers can effectively design for the global village. ■

If the World Were a Village

If a village of 100 people represented the world's entire population—six billion people—it would look something like this:

- Of the 100 people in the village, 61 are from Asia, 21 are from China, 17 are from India and 5 are from the United States.
- In the global village there are more than 6,000 languages, but more than half the population speaks eight languages: 22 speak a Chinese dialect, nine speak English, eight speak Hindi, seven speak Spanish, four speak Arabic, four speak Bengali, three speak Portuguese and three speak Russian.
- More than half the villagers are under the age of 30.
- Of the 100 people, 88 are old enough to read, 71 can read at least a little, and 17 cannot read at all. More men are taught to read than women.
- If all the money in the village were divided equally, each person would have about \$6,200 per year. But in the global village, money is not divided equally. The richest 20 people each have more than \$9,000 a year; the poorest 20 people each have less than \$1 a day.
- The average cost of food, shelter and other necessities in the village is \$4,000 to \$5,000 per year.
- Seventy-six villagers have electricity; 24 do not.
- In the village there are 42 radios, 24 televisions, 30 telephones (half of them cellular phones) and 10 computers.
- By 2100 or sooner, there will be 250 people in the village. Many experts think that 250 is the maximum number of people the village can sustain.

From: *If the World Were a Village: A Book About the World's People* by David Smith (Kid Can Press Ltd., 2002)