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Managing-as-Designing in an Era of Massive Innovation

A Call for Design-Inspired Corporate Citizenship

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IN THIS ARTICLE I ATTEMPT TO articulate an exciting and rapidly emerging learning agenda at the intersection of corporate citizenship and the field of **design thinking**. To realise its vast potential, the discipline of corporate citizenship now needs to become a leading-edge vortex of innovation—all about seeing the world not simply as it is but as it could be—and that's what the field of design thinking is all about.

This article outlines the contours of the design thinking focus of the 2009 second *Global Forum for Business as an Agent of World Benefit*¹ and asks: How can we, as leaders and scholars in the corporate citizenship domain, leverage today's unprecedented new consensus for a sustainable society (see Paul Hawken's *Blessed Unrest* [2007]) and now make a decisive shift in our central question from 'what do

we want?' to the question of 'how might we . . . ?'

How might we is a designer's favourite question and assumes a loosely connected consensus on visions of the future—that is, the stage where there is just enough agreement to get started designing and iterating—and that's precisely why tomorrow's most successful corporate citizenship offices might well look more like a design studio than anything else. Beginning with some brief background on the *Global Forum for Business as an Agent of World Benefit*, this article offers a learning agenda in the form of 11 sets of questions—each intended to invite conversation, exploration and help build practical bridges between corporate citizenship as a moral discipline and the innovation-generating capacity of design thinking. It's a combination poised for cross-pollination. As business is increasingly embracing design thinking as the next frontier in competitive advantage (see Boland and Collopy 2004; Martin 2009) and as corporate citizenship is rapidly emerging as a catalyst for unexpected, disruptive business innovation (Porter and Kramer 2006; Laszlo 2008; Cooperrider 2008), we believe that the marriage of design thinking and corporate citizenship repre-

1 For more on the collaboration between the UN Global Compact, the Academy of Management's OD Division, and Case Western Reserve University's Fowler Center for Sustainable Value at the Weatherhead School of Management—a collaboration leading to the 2009 second *Global Forum for Business as an Agent of World Benefit*—please see worldbenefit.cwru.edu/global-forum (accessed 8 March 2010).

sents a fertile verge and potential inflection point for the field. Can you imagine corporate citizenship offices being the 'go to' places and the sought-after creative spark for business innovation—inspiring new products and services, opening new markets, creating differentiated customer experience and meanings, energising the workforce, and creating game-changing impacts across an industry?

Sustainable design will dominate the management agenda for decades to come

Imagine the world 30 years from now and consider the following scenario for the economy:

It's a bright-green restorative economy that purifies the air we breathe; it has eliminated the concept of waste and toxic by-products; extreme poverty has been eradicated; it is powered through solar and renewable energy innovations; it offers large increases in prosperity for everyone in the world; it is supported through market signals that generate positive incentives aligned with the long-term social good (thus, it has virtually eliminated 'perverse incentives'); the economy's industry-leading stars are celebrated as creators of sustainable value; the corporate citizenship movement has united sustainable design and business strategy into a positive race to the top; it is a globally inclusive system that respects and replenishes the health of people, diverse communities and the wealth of nature; and it is all built on an economy of institutions that are widely trusted as *positive institutions*—workplaces that elevate, magnify and refract our highest human strengths (wisdom, courage, humanity, compassion, inspiration, creativity, freedom, hope, joy, integrity, love and meaning) into the world.

This, in a nutshell, was the essence of the 2020 vision of the desired future of an inclusive economy where people thrive, businesses win, and nature flourishes as

articulated by senior executives, researchers, and management students coming together at the first *Global Forum for Business as an Agent of World Benefit*. In many ways the surprisingly clear and agreed upon vision (something that would not have happened a decade ago) reflects an unprecedented worldwide urge for positive change and signals an increasingly shared vision, uncoordinated but blooming, emerging everywhere. Paul Hawken (2007) describes it as a 'blessed unrest'—millions of people and organisations spontaneously bringing about what may one day be recognised as the most profound transformation of human society.

But shared vision does not imply simple solutions. Certainly huge realities stand in contrast to the images of a desired future as outline above. Daily we are reminded of what's ahead including the sheer magnitude of change itself: rising temperatures and freak weather patterns; recognition of peak oil and the severe environmental, economic and social costs of burning fossil fuels; the possibility of the 'Sixth Extinction' (the incomprehensible loss of half the species on Earth by 2050); ripple effects of a mushrooming global population of 8–14 billion people; constant reminders of the possibility of nuclear holocaust and well-orchestrated terror; billions of people locked in grinding poverty; and of course the emergence of a world where masses more (people in every one of the emerging economies) want to live in exactly the same prosperous ways as those already living in ecological overshoot (that is, in a state where natural capital is used up with such intensity that Earth systems are unable to restore themselves).

Alex Steffen (2006) comments:

So here we are. We need, in the next twenty-five years or so, to do something never before done. We need to consciously re-design the entire material basis of our civilization. The model we replace it with must be drastically more ecologically sustainable, offer large increases in prosperity to everyone on the planet, and not only function in areas of chaos

and corruption, but also help transform them. That alone is a task of historic magnitude, but there is an additional complication: we only get one shot . . . fail to act boldly enough and we may fail completely.

It is in this context—an unprecedented emerging global vision alongside our 21st century's complex call—that the second Global Forum for Business as an Agent of World Benefit defined its focus and theme for the 2009 summit: *Manage by Designing in an Era of Massive Innovation*. The purpose: to set the stage for exploration into the primacy and potency of **design thinking** as the vortex for creating a new breed of industry-leading stars, showing how the creative design attitude can transform 21st-century corporate citizenship into a source of business opportunity and world-benefiting innovation. In addition, as the words in the title 'massive innovation' suggested, the call is also all about scaling up, about amplifying, as it is increasingly clear that we're no longer lacking in isolated product exemplars or surprising and wonderful business-driven sustainability solutions. Today's greater challenge lies in **system-wide design**—discovering ways of overcoming the systemic challenges of collaborative innovation and applied human creativity not only in large multinational corporations, but across multi-stakeholder supply chains, whole bio-regions, entire industries and professions, and across economies and geographies where billions are locked in debilitating poverty. Indeed ours is a moment where the magnitude of change has amplified in globally critical ways—where everything reverberates, acts on and interacts with everything else.

An era of massive change is, therefore, an opportunity for magnified innovation. It is a call for a stepped-up human creativity at a scale and sense of purpose that represents a new order of magnitude. Moreover, to value *innovation* in systemic-design terms is indeed to value one of the most abundant, renewable resources we can draw on. In theory, with today's connective technologies, there are no limits

to human imagination and cooperation (Cooperrider and Dutton 1999) and yet, especially in management practice, one overarching question looms large: what do we really know about design thinking at the increasingly larger scales of the whole?

The remainder of this article explores the design thinking agenda at three levels—individual managers, whole systems, and the implications for management education—and goes on to develop a list of 11 topic areas and questions for future exploration. The list is not meant to be exhaustive but expansive; it represents an invitation and introduction to a long-term conversation for scholars and practitioners alike.

Managing-as-designing

What can managers learn from the field of design and how might the design attitude help us turn social and global issues into bona fide business opportunities?

Businesses everywhere are discovering the power and promise of design and increasingly managers and management schools are turning to architects, creative artists, graphic specialists, product designers, open source communities, nature's design genius and performing artists as inspired models for innovation, improvisational leadership and collaborative designing. New volumes such as *Managing as Designing* (Boland and Collopy 2004); *Artful Making: What Managers Need to Know About How Artists Work* (Austin and Devin 2003); *Discovering Design* and *The Idea of Design* (Margolin and Buchanan 1995, 1996); *Designing Information and Organizations With a Positive Lens* (Avital et al. 2008); *Appreciative Intelligence* (Thatchenkery and Metzker 2006) and *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation* (Brown 2009) are portraying the essence of management not so much as a science of rational decisions within a known and stable world but, instead, as

the art of generating design visions, cultivating appreciative intelligence, rapid prototypes, feedback loops and iterative pathways embedded within an increasingly uncertain and dynamic world. Indeed Nobel laureate Herb Simon (1996) outlined the three pillars of management as ‘intelligence’, ‘choice’ and ‘design’; yet somehow, over the years, the design pillar has been conspicuously glossed over in favour of a decision-analytic stance.

Why don’t our management schools, for example, look like design studios, alive with hot interdisciplinary teams and innovation labs, bringing together the latest and best in applied creativity and ‘the science of the artificial’? What might managers of corporate citizenship learn about managing and leading from an iconoclastic architect such as William McDonough, or an acclaimed design firm such as IDEO, or the whole field of biomimicry where innovation is elevated and inspired by nature? How might the design mind, and its many disciplines, enlarge our conception of good managing, especially as it relates to the next stages of corporate citizenship and the game-changing potentials of sustainable value? Equally important is the question’s reversal: how might the domains of corporate citizenship and sustainable value transform design? After all, as researchers have estimated, 80% of the social and ecological footprint of a product, service or system is determined in the design phase.

Topics and key questions for a long-term conversation between corporate citizenship and managing-as-designing are outlined below.

1. Ethos and culture of design

What do we know about the ethos and culture of design—the enabling metaphors, vocabularies, attitudes, appreciative intelligence and ‘designerly ways of knowing’—and how might managing-as-designing enrich the domains of global citizenship and sustainable value creation, and vice versa?

2. Future of managing-as-designing

What’s next as we peer into the future of designing? What might design environments—those most conducive to generating unexpected solutions to seemingly insurmountable trade-offs—look like in the future? What is the role of the visual in design? New design skills and virtual technologies? Multi-stakeholder modalities? Cheap and rapid iteration? Imaginative competence and foresight? Values? Or what about the domain of the aesthetic in corporate citizenship as it is played out in consumer design, including the role of positive human experience and emotions such as hope, inspiration and joy? Do corporate citizenship offices already make these things a priority: that is, delighting the customer and designing initiatives that elevate meaning, passion and significance? Might such considerations differentiate great corporate citizenship from mediocre or conservative approaches? Where are the examples of corporate citizenship placing customer experience at the heart of the practice? What are the results?

3. Design of corporate citizenship, sustainability and social entrepreneurship

How might managing-as-designing transform research on the business case for global corporate citizenship, sustainability and social entrepreneurship? What do we really know about the organisational practices and instances of powerful design innovation where ‘the great trade-off illusion’—the belief that firms must sacrifice outstanding financial performance if they choose to strategically address societal challenges—has been eclipsed or even radically reversed? In other words, do we have a theory of how corporate citizenship or sustainability can become an engine of value creation that dramatically exceeds common expectations—for society, shareholders and stakeholders? And in more practical terms how do we respond

to the practising CEO who asks, 'what can we do to systematically create a culture of innovation *via* corporate citizenship and sustainable value, one that will turn on an entire workforce and propel industry-leading and world-benefiting success? Can the lens of sustainability really help us realise superior performance—and, if so, exactly how?'

4. The 80% design conundrum

Before we elevate design thinking to a level beyond reproach, what do we do with the haunting statistic that 80% of our environmental and social footprint resides in the design stage of products, services and the building of larger systems? How might the field of management inquiry join forces with a visionary 'cradle-to-cradle' architect such as William McDonough (McDonough and Braungart 2002) or a 'massive change' designer such as Bruce Mau (2004), to advance the field of 'positive design', which rejects the industrial and post-industrial paradigm of doing 'less bad' (Sachs 2009)? What are the big questions we should be asking to propel a positive design discipline that is focused on generating wholly positive cradle-to-cradle effects—products, services, interactions, technical and financial systems, buildings and organisations designed not to do less harm but to regenerate, enrich and elevate life?

Massive innovation and design: change at the scale of the whole?

In his most recent volume, *Common Wealth*, the macro-economist Jeffrey Sachs (2009) describes the privileged moment we live in: 'ours is the generation that can eradicate extreme poverty, turn the tide against climate change, and head off the thoughtless extinction of other species'. From the economist's perspective these are not utopian goals. The investments,

Sachs argues, are tiny in comparison with the returns. For less than 1% of the rich world's income, for example, an economic cycle of empowerment can be generated where nobody has to die of poverty. The solutions, in many instances, are all there. The resources, likewise, are all there. But questions of system-wide change remain, especially concerning the means and methods for building global cooperative capacity for overcoming classic collective action dilemmas.

Likewise in the realm of sustainable business, it is increasingly clear that we're no longer lacking in isolated sustainability solutions. Everyone, in some manner or another, is going green or socially responsible. Our greater challenge lies in *system-wide design*—for creating more widespread commonwealth and for discovering the ways of overcoming the challenges of collaborative creativity across multi-stakeholder supply chains, entire industries and larger whole systems.

Of course it is also true that the design of the positive sustainable future will emerge out of numberless diverse acts of courage and innovation; successful small steps that influence the systems to which we are connected. But today's big prizes and most interesting questions—whether for a Wal-Mart seeking to catalyse a profitable sustainability revolution across a vast range of stakeholder networks, or an industry association attempting to build an industry-wide system that is part of the solution, or a global society that can turn gridlock into inspirational innovation—involve the questions of change at larger and larger scales of wholeness. Each of these, we are now clear, involves succeeding in the art of system-wide design and transformation.

In many ways, implementing the sustainable future that we envision requires extraordinary abilities for massive, scaled-up innovation including multi-stakeholder and interdisciplinary design modalities focused on enduring, systemic change. Jeffrey Sachs puts the case persuasively. The single most important variable affecting our fate is global cooperation and,

as he writes, ‘it’s a fundamental point of blinding simplicity’. It’s also the central executive question faced by every CEO. Whether we are talking about designing a sustainable enterprise with a 67,000 person telecommunications firm, or seeking to scale up micro-enterprise solutions such as the Millennium Development Villages concept, the pervasive question looms large: yes we’ve learned a lot about managing change, but what do we really know about change at the scale of the whole?²

Topics and key questions for a long-term conversation between corporate citizenship and managing-as-designing in this theme area are shown next.

5. Finding leverage points for system change

Can we develop better typologies and distinctions for the study of design projects with systemic aims? For example, designers are studying ‘mega-communities’, and design innovation specialist Jason Pearson (2004) has initiated a typology for a variety of collective action situations and design approaches which include:³

- ▶ **Type 1 ‘integrative projects’**. For example, the Sustainable Packaging Coalition, which seek to engage and affect a rich set of relationships and systems
- ▶ **Type 2 ‘key ingredient projects’**. These are likened to enzymes or natural catalysts making tiny discrete interventions that allow whole systems to utilise their inherent potential, often generating dramatic possibilities to unlock latent strengths for positive change such as the enzyme innovation of a Grameen Bank
- ▶ **Type 3 ‘alignment projects’**. These redirect (much like Aikido) a system’s inherent potential by devising effective means of realigning incentives with desired outcomes and often requiring a creative leap of imagination
- ▶ **Type 4 ‘framework projects’**. These are likened to ‘artificial reefs’—solid structures to which others can attach, providing a foundation for a flourishing ecosystem of emergent concepts and strategies, giving rise to systems-aware solutions (e.g. UN Global Compact, InnoCentive and LEED green building system)

From discovery and generation of typologies such as this one many other questions of interest begin to emerge: what are the distinctive life-generating factors in each? The enablers? Unique challenges? The outcomes? The contextual conditions . . . ?

6. Designing forums for transformational cooperation

What do we know about complex multi-stakeholder forums, global summits and large group dynamics, especially those (e.g. the Appreciative Inquiry Summit) that move beyond dialogue to actual designing in multi-stakeholder groups ranging in size from three hundred people to several thousand? Some argue that radical innovation can only happen when we bring multidisci-

2 This theme is not meant to gloss over or devalue small steps, for example see Karl Weick’s (1984) ‘Small Wins’ and Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point* (2002). Small steps—especially in the world-changing arena of social entrepreneurship—are happening every moment that influence the big systems to which we are all connected. The idea is to place designing—even the smallest product—into the mind-set of systemic designing. We know too, for example, that product design isn’t merely ‘the architecture for small things’. As Steffen (2006) traces it, the moment we tear the wrapper from a new toy, that toy is part of a vast story involving the mining of metals, the pumping of oil, the operation of huge factories, the printing of packaging materials, the reverberations of advertising, the relations of international trade, the toxic issues of lead and gigantic mountains of waste. See Alex Steffen, *World-Changing* (2006).

3 For more on Jason Pearson’s typology for system-wide design projects go to www.greenblue.org (accessed 9 March 2010).

plinary, multi-sectoral and multicultural groups together around systemic design opportunities (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005). We have all heard the continuing call for higher levels of systems thinking. But what are we learning about systems living; that is, living it or *doing systems thinking* by bringing whole systems into collaborative design? Could it be that having designers in the mix is key to success in multidisciplinary collaboration and critical to uncovering unexplored areas of innovation? And, in truly concrete terms, how might we re-imagine worldwide meetings? How might a global corporation's annual senior leadership conference be designed to realise the fruits of collaborative innovation? How might industry and professional associations transform their expensive industry-spanning meetings to spark systemic sustainability? How might the UN redesign the next world summit on sustainable development? Or what might a collaborative design summit look like focused on achieving the long-delayed solar revolution?

7. Designing system change from everywhere

What are the roles of social entrepreneurs, citizen-led initiatives, grass-roots organising, web-enabled communities and social networking applications in raising consciousness about sustainability, devising 'glocal' innovations and igniting popular movements that press for change? Massive innovation need not only emerge top-down from educated elites or diffuse from the centres to the peripheries of the global economy. World-changing ideas often emerge from unlikely persons and places. With the revolution in telecommunications and the Internet, new possibilities emerge for putting diverse peoples and ideas together, for accelerating the pace and scope of innovation, and for promoting change from the bottom up or across cultures. What does design thinking add to virtual forms of organisation? What kinds of design give meaningful shape and purpose to social networks and innovations that

might otherwise resist formalisation? What does leadership mean in highly distributed environments where interest in sustainability is high but the means for linking interest to innovative action are uncertain?

8. The design and redesign of the concept of the corporation

What are the next stages—new visions, macro-innovations and new principles—in the future design of the corporation itself? Modern corporations are arguably the most powerful social institutions of our day. In many ways, they govern modern life. But, all too frequently, propose Kelly and White (2007), the topic of corporate design focuses on single companies, single issues and single incidents. We rarely step back and look comprehensively at the concept of the corporation itself. Corporate design, in systemic terms, asks larger questions of fundamental purpose and structure. What is the purpose of the firm? What kinds of structure and system give life to that purpose? How might corporations be designed in order to blend social, environmental, governance and financial mission at their very core? Could it be, as Kelly and White propose, that 'corporate design is the macro-design challenge of the 21st century'?⁴

Redesigning management education for the future

If anything imaginable were possible, how might we imagine and design responsible management education?

Shortly before he passed away, Peter Drucker, in a concise and remarkable few words, reunited management strategy and social responsibility into one powerful

4 For more on the design of the concept of the corporation—where the goal is to develop and disseminate corporate designs in which social purpose moves from the periphery to the heart of the organisation—see the concept paper by Marjorie Kelly and Allen White (2007).

and integral whole when he said: ‘I wrote about it many years ago . . . “that every single social and global issue of our day is a business opportunity in disguise”—just waiting for the innovation, the pragmatism, and the strategic capacity of great companies to aim higher’.⁵ Along this dimension, of envisioning a truly strategic mind-set towards global citizenship, the question must be asked: when judged in relationship to the needs and opportunities of our times, how well is management education doing and, more importantly, where are the innovations in curricula, values, methods, research agendas, partnerships and interdisciplinary dialogues? If anything imaginable were possible, how might we re-imagine and design a new kind of responsible management education—one that enables every manager to turn social and global issues into bona fide business opportunities (actually creating the business case) while simultaneously building a more inclusive and sustainable global economy?

Topics and key questions for a long-term conversation between corporate citizenship and managing-as-designing, especially as it relates to management education in the future, follow in the next sections.

9. New designs for business schools

What might B-schools look like if they were designed to draw on the best of our D-schools? How might a cross-fertilisation between the two—for example the exciting collaborations emerging at Stanford University between the Design School and Business School—serve to inform, strengthen and enliven interdisciplinary education in the arenas of sustainability, social entrepreneurship and global citizenship? As the Stanford D-School—co-founded by David Kelley of IDEO—states:

We believe having designers in the mix is key to success in multidisciplinary collaboration and critical to uncovering unexplored areas of innovation. Designers provide a methodology that all parties can embrace and a design environment conducive to innovation. In our experience, design thinking is the glue that holds these kinds of communities together and makes them successful (Stanford University Institute of Design).⁶

10. Action-based responsible management education

How might we better unite the strengths of management education with real-life design studio-type opportunities for partnering on the world agenda as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact and the world’s Millennium Development promises of eradicating extreme poverty? How might we, in truly concrete terms, mobilise the newly emerging Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) as a global platform for linking universities, think-tanks and leadership institutes into networks of sharing and learning and scaled-up impact? Most concretely, how might we, in support of responsible management education, come together to achieve a global curriculum renaissance?

11. Sustainability and management education

What are the stakeholders of management education likely to be calling for in the future? How are our young people—the next generation of leaders—feeling about questions of sustainability and responsible business? Likewise as our CEOs look to the future, what kinds of manager—the skills, mind-sets and capabilities—are they going to need to succeed? Is sustainable value something that will be relevant

⁵ See David Cooperrider’s (2003) interview with Peter Drucker in the Appreciative Inquiry Commons.

⁶ Stanford University Institute of Design, ‘Design Thinking’; dschool.stanford.edu/big_picture/design_thinking.php, accessed 2009–2010.

only to a few, perhaps a separate, sidelined department, or will it be central and pervasive, something that is part of the winning formula of industry leading stars? And what about the vast array of other business stakeholders—customers, communities, shareholders, NGOs, governments and Earth itself—what specifically will they be calling for, let's say, by 2020? Will management education be prepared to lead in the domain of sustainable design, as in the Latin root for education, *educare*, which means 'to lead forth', in transformational learning? Is this a time for evolution or revolution in management education?

Conclusion and a beginning

This article has attempted to bring focus to a major movement happening in the fields of management and corporate citizenship and provide an insight into the range of exciting dialogues taking place across these fields and the discipline of design thinking. Through the conjoining of literatures, and the articulation of 11 sets of questions, my hope with this Turning Point was to invite you to join these discussions, appreciate their potentials, sample their dedication to the human capacity for innovation and collaboration and, most hopefully, take away something of value. We are witnessing the early stages of the democratising of design, bringing its culture into the heart of corporate citizenship. So this article is clearly not intended as a conclusion but as a beginning. As stated above, we need, in the next 25 years or so, to do something never before done. We need to consciously redesign the entire material basis of our civilisation. The model we replace it with must be dramatically more ecologically sustainable, offer large increases in prosperity to everyone on the planet, and not only function in areas of chaos and corruption, but also help to transform them. As the CEO of design firm IDEO, Tim Brown (2009: 37), recently said: 'Design is now too important to be left to designers.'

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