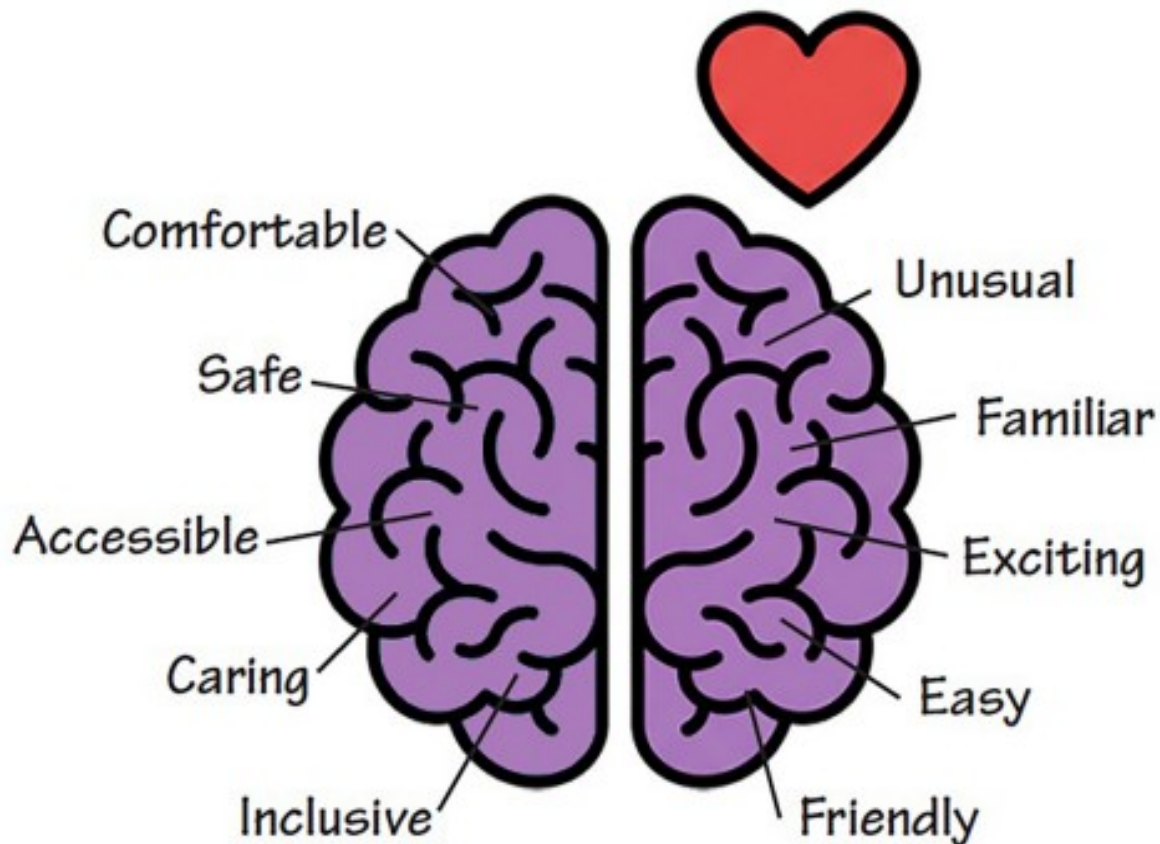




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Design for All



Emotions

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Guest Editor:



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Dan consults globally on design and innovation. An early proponent of Inclusive Design, he established ThinkActHuman on the idea that design is about people, not things. He also co-founded the Masters in Branding program at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. In 2025, along with Dr. Fiona Maciver, he launched the design initiative "StayHuman," decoding emotion in consumer behavior.

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YouTube series Well Equipped, which has gained more than 65 million views.

Foreword:

Design and Emotion

I’ve known Dr. Tom Guarriello since we co-founded, along with several others, the Masters in Branding program at the School of Visual Arts in New York City more than 15 years ago. Tom’s background is clinical psychology, and he brings a valuable perspective to our association with brands. In virtually every conversation I have with him, he mentions things that forever stick in my mind. In a conversation years ago he planted in my brain an old Buddhist metaphor, the Elephant and the Rider. (This is also discussed in Tom’s 2025 book, *The Meaning of Branded Objects*.) Briefly put, the Rider represents Logic. The Elephant represents Emotion. When conflict arises, the elephant goes where it wants to go. The rider becomes helpless and goes along for the ride. Emotion prevails.

Another point about elephants, this one unrelated to my discussions with Dr. Tom or Buddhists: within elephant society the community will help care for others in the community. An injury to one elephant triggers response from the others to help. Of if needed the community will protect and raise a young elephant if their parent becomes incapacitated.

When it comes to caring, we (humans) are like elephants. Emotions, including our instinct to care, sit at the base of “Design for All.”

Many people are surprised to realize that every product they see and touch, thousands during the day, were designed by a person. Although

with great products, people realize that someone was thinking when the product was designed. And that it was created “with me in mind,” somebody cared. Great products establish personal connections.

With “caring” in mind I set the theme of this issue to be about design and emotions. I asked the authors to consider the world we live in. Our days are filled with interactions with objects and environments developed by companies and brands – and in best-case scenarios, designed by people within those companies who care. In real life, it’s sometimes yes, sometimes no.

Within this framework the guest-authors discuss human connections, as well as brand connections. We will align with people and brands that care, and shy away from those that don’t.

The articles are arranged in alphabetical order of first names.

Beth Macdonald discusses design for all by focusing on inclusive leadership. This entails embracing vulnerability, and actively inviting diverse perspectives into the room., accommodating diverse human experiences.

My article discusses products and brands developed by people who care. People don’t always realize that there are people behind the thousands of products they encounter every day – products just fall out of the sky. This can be especially important with the medications people take – pharmaceutical companies are perceived as cold entities and are generally not well liked. In view of the dismal statistics on non-compliance with medications, addressing emotional connections surrounding motivation and compliance presents an opportunity for improving in our health.

Dr. Fiona Maciver advises that inclusivity is not complete unless emotional responses are taken into consideration. Feelings are a dimension of accessibility; a design may be physically accessible but still feel hostile.

Lady Tube calls for a deeper emotional understanding of inclusion and why some people feel left out. She uses as example her field of cybersecurity, why so many people experience preventable harm due to a learned helplessness regarding digital defense. And the need for an empathy-driven approach.

Louis Angsico coach's leadership for companies and organizations in the Philippines and around Asia. He points to the fact that change requires addressing the emotions influencing human responses. However, emotions can unfortunately be suppressed in favor of analysis and problem-solving methods.

Purva Sawant discusses physical and digital spaces and encourages us to think beyond the typical barriers to accessibility. She points out that a person should also *feel* like they are meant to be there. There's an emotional impact even when first encountering the design, untouched. Her article points to gaps between "entry" and "belonging."

Dr. Sara Emilia Bernat "proposes that emotional range constitutes an unaddressed dimension of Universal Design." She discusses "softness" and the opportunities for brands to embrace it as a quality critical to success. In the face of an optimization economy, and assumptions about "who belongs," emotions become a missing consideration.

Dr. Tom Guarriello writes that our relationships with objects reveal an important aspect of human nature. He points to the brand loyalty people have with two major automobile manufacturers in the US, Ford and Chevy. We align or mis-align with brands personally.

All authors place valuable perspective on the topic of emotions and its impact on Design for all.

Dan Formosa, Ph.D.



Beth Macdonald

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The Transformation Soup: How to develop leaders

Beth Macdonald

Abstract

Leadership development is fundamentally an experiential design challenge rooted in human emotion. True transformation requires balancing the emotional "heat" of self-awareness with a carefully designed "container"—a supportive, inclusive environment that prevents overwhelm and fosters agency. Drawing from somatic practices, systems thinking, and organizational ethnography, this article explores how to design leadership frameworks that treat conflict as information, emotions as allies, and hierarchy as a system rather than an absolute truth. Ultimately, implementing "design for all" within organizations requires cultivating inclusive leadership spaces that slow down, embrace vulnerability, and actively invite diverse perspectives into the room.

Keywords

Design and Emotion, Leadership Development, Somatic Work, Organizational Transformation, Inclusive Leadership

Introduction” Leadership development

I come to the question of leadership development from a few points of view:

- **having been a global corporate leader myself,**
- **having started up 5 companies ranging from organizational development to industrial design to biotechnology,**
- **and being a global organizational development practitioner.**

This means, I have been the recipient of complex Big 5 interventions, sat on my own wistfully wishing I had support, and, I hope, the trusted provider of support to executives around the world.

Leadership development programs and self-awareness

Leadership development programs are often built on self-awareness. Self-awareness isn't always pleasant.

- **Sometimes we learn we're not as good as we thought we were.**
- **Or people we thought admired us, aren't actually very impressed.**
- **Demons are dragged from childhoods into the present making us terrifyingly vulnerable in public.**

These bitter pills often make us want to avoid the medicine. How do we as designers create and maintain engagement? How do we design for the desired shift? Not just in the self-awareness of the individual, but in the culture of the organization?

Leadership development must be inherently inclusive, designing emotional spaces that accommodate and value diverse human experiences. This can depend on our intellectual heritage. Are we committed to using deep psychological methods and psychodynamic

streams? Do we value intellectual rigor and challenge? Are mindsets the key to transformation? Do we believe that mindsets and their imbedded behaviors crumble in the face of data? That assessments are the source of enlightenment?

It may also depend on our culture and its conditioning. Do we believe the “heat of battle” makes the leader? That the anvil and hammer create the form? Must we be broken to evolve to high order? Are we setting out on a Vision Quest? Or is transformation a function of community? We go where our tribe goes? We do what our tribe needs? Is it a function of leadership – we travel in the direction of their vision? Their example? Is it simply a function of meeting market needs? Responding to customer demands?

No matter whether the heat comes from intense intellectual competition or from deep soul-shaking psychological revelation, the essential question is “does the heat result in transformation?”

I am drawn to creating warmth to allow the softening. To holding space, creating a container that keeps us in the soup of transformation without melting, drowning, or flooding. Some might call this the point of choice what Buddhists call *vedanā*, the place the “feeling-tone” arises, before it hardens into reaction. A container that keeps us in this space creates agency without overwhelm. For me, this choiceful space is where true transformation happens. Enough heat to allow us to take another shape, not enough to create a meltdown. Heat without that preserved choice-point is not transformation. It is being overwhelmed by better lighting.

We need a container that can metabolize the heat it generates. A furnace with a fine holding environment (well-run group relations, skilled somatic titration, clear intellectual frameworks, a

compassionate journey to self-awareness, a clear view of the system) produces development.

I'm sure there are many ways to achieve this state. For me, working with the body, somatic work, speeds the process. Reflection, mindfulness, connection, all support the transformation. Simple, clear frameworks that map the way forward. And of course, the word of the decade: Inclusion.

How do we design for inclusion in leadership development?

In decades of leadership development and collaboration development, I have discovered a few things that seem to work.

To create the container, it's important to define the journey. Where are we trying to go and why. What's in it for me as an individual? For my tribe? I do my best to present as an informed observer, not an expert. Certainly not an expert in their system or their work. So, it follows that it's important to acknowledge the expertise in the room and invite it in. From the anthropological perspective, I am the outside observer seeking inside informants.

One of the trickiest things is to treat conflict as information, rather than a battle or an attack. This often means presenting experience and level differences as essential sources of information about the system, not hierarchies of rightness. It's also often useful to create shared vocabulary of needs and emotions. To develop the capacity for expressing distinctions that often turns conflict into a wealth of perspective.

Moving emotions from demons to allies is one of the most important steps in this journey. Following the admonitions of Yuri Hannen to examine the usefulness of emotions: Does fear drive preparation? Or

freeze us. Does confidence set its own trap? What about our moods? Do they resource us? Anchor us? Freeze us? Again, vocabulary and distinctions are important to our insight.

Within organizations, we often feel targeted, misunderstood, dumped on. Creating organizational empathy and system sight creates the possibility that these behaviors aren't personal, they're a consequence of structure, of position in the system. This shift from taking it personally to seeing its origin in the system is often an emotional pressure valve. The work of Barry Oshry is essential to this revelation.

During the tricky process of developing self-awareness, it's often useful to treat assessments as information in the moment, sources of perspective, not truth. It helps to encourage curiosity and inquiry. To provide grounded assessments rather than assertions. Ethnography, especially video ethnography, is a powerful shift of perspective – showing us how we show up is often enough in itself. No additional assessment or input required. No threatening third-party telling us how we are, causing us to contract and withdraw.

Assessments and maps are important. Good assessments are grounded. Maps, like Organizational Network Analyses, give us a view of the tribe and its estuaries. They allow participants to see themselves in the system and choose whether or how to shift. They give data on which to ground interventions into the systems for which they are responsible.

On both individual and group levels slowing down is a marvelous elixir. This might be using a process like Warm Data to create deeper, warmer human connection - which often activates the principle of cognitive dissonance to help us listen to colleagues. (We share some

perspective, experience, point of view, so they can't be THAT bad.) Or time spent sitting at the bottom of Otto Scharmer's famous U. Breathing. Allowing time and space for whatever is there to arrive. Then moving forward into prototyping and experimentation – which comes with the built-in and celebratory expectation of failure. Cause we're trying, not knowing.

We whip up the "transformative soup" but the nourishment needs to move beyond us. We need to equip the participants to create their own soups.

Along this path expect tears. Laughter. Self-doubt. If we're lucky, dancing.



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Medication non-compliance: Even fear of death isn't always a motivator

Dan Formosa, Ph.D.

Abstract:

Medication non-compliance presents us with a critical challenge, with non-adherence rates reaching up to 50% or 60%. Within six months of a new prescription, up to 60% of patients discontinue treatment altogether. Twenty percent never even pick up their medication from the pharmacy. While high costs and side effects are notable barriers, psychological and emotional factors heavily dictate patient behavior. Compliance is particularly low for asymptomatic conditions like hypertension, due to a lack of physical feedback. Barriers like depression, denial of an illness or general avoidance cause severe disruption. Every prescription carries emotional weight, evoking responses from hope to dread – sometimes simultaneously. Successfully addressing non-compliance requires looking beyond the medicine itself to inclusively understand the complex emotional impact and human behaviors driving patient adherence.

Keywords: *Medication adherence, Patient non-compliance, Design and emotion, Design and behavior, Inclusive design*

The most impactful advancement we can make in pharmaceuticals is not a new medicine. It's getting the people who have been prescribed medications to take them. Non-compliance is rampant.

The statistics are staggering. Non-compliance for medications can be as high as 50% to 60%, people not taking them as they should. People are simply not good at it. The percentage is highest for people taking more than one medication at different times in the day – that includes many people.

The dropout rate is just as concerning – 6 months after being prescribed a medication up to 60% of people will stop taking it completely. The problem can begin before it gets started: 20% of prescription medications are never even picked up at the pharmacy.

There are numerous causes for noncompliance. Cost is a factor that is difficult to overcome, the costs of medications can be excessive and can counteract any incentive to take them. Fear of side effects is another factor. Side effects can be most severe when starting a regimen, and many people don't get past the start-up point. Lack of symptoms is another cause. Motivation is higher for drugs preventing migraine headaches, for example, where the relief can be felt. When taking medications for cholesterol or high blood pressure, nothing is felt – although those drugs are at work, a person receives no noticeable feedback. Depression is another factor. Whether slight (prompting avoidance) or more severe, it can lead to a person's unwillingness to take medications as prescribed. In some cases, denial is in effect – a person refusing to believe that they are sick enough to take a medication.

Every new prescription produces an emotional impact, positive, negative and sometimes both. Taking a dose can result in feelings of

hope or feelings of dread. While a medication will improve and maintain health, it is also a personal reminder that a health issue exists. In previous observational research on medications, our team found that just the act of sorting pills into segmented weekly containers can be depressing, a reminder that the person has one or several medical problems.

In the US, a third of adults between the ages of 50 and 64 take four or more prescription drugs. At age 65 and older, 54% take four or more prescription drugs, with 20% taking ten or more. Taking medications as directed is good for the person taking it, good for the healthcare system, and good for the pharmaceutical company and pharmacy who are selling the medications. In contrast, non-compliance helps no one.

How can we encourage people to willingly take their medications and reduce these non-compliance numbers? Even though their products are improving health and saving lives, pharmaceutical companies are far from being well liked. A 2019 poll by Gallup revealed that the pharmaceutical industry was viewed negatively by 58% of the US population, placing it at the bottom of a 20-industry list (Michigan Journal of Economics, 2026). Words such as untrustworthy, evil and corrupt were used to describe the industry. A 2026 poll by the Pharmaceutical Reform Alliance (PRA) reports that 94% of people in America blame healthcare's high costs on the pharma companies. Meanwhile people rely on pharmaceuticals more than ever before.

Pharmaceutical companies are perceived to be cold, impersonal entities. Their advertisements attempt to counteract that, touting care and tugging on people's emotions with images and personal stories. Ads are rarely about the medication itself, they show people

getting their life back. Ads may begin with images eliciting empathy, showing for example a person struggling, in pain, frustrated, isolated or fearful of their fate. Subsequent images turn upbeat, focusing on positive human experiences, emotional relief and restoring a normal carefree life. Post-medication, the people are socializing, playing with the kids, and getting back to hobbies and recreational activities. However, the actual experience of onboarding a new medication may not be pleasant at all.

To address the problem directly, pharmaceutical companies need to take the approach that they are not providing a medication for thousands of people, they are providing a medication for thousands of individuals. Every touchpoint needs to be carefully curated, from first exposure seeing the medication or package (in television ads, online or introductory videos), to taking the medication the first time, through to disposal (if a device is involved) and refilling the prescription. Importantly, pharma companies need to understand the needs of the people most likely to be non-compliant or who take their medications incorrectly.

A challenge we are up against is motivation, nudging people to take their medications as directed. It's a challenge when, for some people, even fear-of-death may not be enough to motivate someone to comply, or to change an unhealthy behavior or lifestyle. Instructing someone what to do and what not to do, even when clearly communicated, can be ineffective in prompting a change. Referring to the Buddhist metaphor of the Rider and the Elephant – the rider represents logic; the elephant represents emotion. Despite the rider's wishes, the elephant will go where it wants to go. The rider must go along. Understanding the inner thoughts that drive non-compliance is key to solving the problem.

Medications can be taken orally, injected or absorbed transdermally (with a patch.) These methods have some issues in common – side effects are most likely to occur early, when the medications are first being used. First impressions may therefore be negative. With each format, working the regimen into a person’s daily life can require a startup period, until taking the medication becomes routine. The challenge there is to get someone to the point where it becomes routine, rather than dropping out early.

Each format has its unique set of usability considerations. Pill taking requires organization, especially for people taking more than one medication. Injectables can be administered with a syringe or with an auto injection device. A needle is involved in both, of course, and needles can be scary for many people. There is also some pain involved.

Standard syringes inherently produce fear, we all know that from childhood. Injection devices can be intimidating. With a standard syringe the injection can be controlled; the speed is controllable and it’s possible to start and stop if needed before the full injection is complete. In contrast, once an autoinjector starts, there is no speed control and it’s not possible to stop it before the injection is complete.

The autoinjector can be pen style (a cylindrical shape) or a rectangular electronic-looking device. Some are designed to be worn on the arm for the day, releasing medication automatically. Unlike a syringe, the needle in autoinjectors may be well hidden and never seen. While less scary because of that—solving one problem—it simultaneously creates a cognitive and emotional challenge due to the complete loss of control once the injection starts.

A transdermal patch is more passive. However, if it is worn on the arm in warm weather when wearing short sleeves, the patch becomes visible. The person wearing the patch may not want it to be seen or have it prompt questions from others. An autoinjector that's worn on the arm has the same issue.

Regardless of format, through careful design we can encourage people to take medications as directed.

Devices need to be designed to be usable by a wide range of people, accommodating those who are most challenged physically and cognitively. The identical syringe or autoinjector design may be used for a variety of medications. Because the medication may be for arthritis, for example, the devices should be designed to fully accommodate people with significant levels of arthritis. Not all devices, unfortunately, take this into consideration. A device can be intimidating visually, physically or both. It should be designed to be self-evident, easy to use and (without looking toy-like) not at all intimidating.

Improving compliance can be accomplished through a coordinated effort by all those involved in creating every touchpoint. We cannot simply rely on logic, the fact that a medication can and will improve our health and longevity. We must also be aware of the emotional impact of every touchpoint a patient will encounter along the way. Those touchpoints need to address the wide range of people taking a medication. Special attention should be given to the people least likely to comply – taking medications incorrectly or dropping out completely. In addition, special consideration should be given to patients onboarding a new medication, helping him, her or them get started during the first three to six months. Empathic design support

should be provided for at least the first 90 days of starting the medication.

Pharmaceutical companies can seem cold and uncaring once a medication is prescribed. With the design of user experience in mind, much can be done to improve the effectiveness of the thousands of medications already prescribed. Caring will make a difference, and the empathy shown in pharmaceutical ads needs to carry through to each touchpoint.

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Designing for Feeling: Why inclusion must consider emotion

Dr. Fiona Maciver

Abstract

While traditional inclusive design focuses on structural and functional access, removing physical and cognitive barriers represents only a partial victory. In an increasingly automated era dominated by AI and self-service systems, optimization can remove friction but inadvertently flatten human experience, rendering systems accessible yet emotionally hostile or indifferent. Human beings do not navigate design merely as users completing tasks; they interpret it through complex emotional realities, anxieties, and memories. Subtle details like tone, timing, and atmosphere serve as critical signals of care, dictating whether individuals feel processed or genuinely understood. Ultimately, "design for all" must expand its mandate beyond mechanical utility to actively account for emotional realities. True inclusion requires a holistic framework that addresses context-specific vulnerabilities, designing quiet, warm, or restrained solutions that ensure every person feels recognized, respected, and fully capable of participating.

Keywords:

Inclusive design, Design for feeling, Emotional realities, Automation and AI, Quality of participation

Introduction: Access includes emotions

Design for all is often discussed in relation to access: whether people can enter, use, read, hear, understand, or navigate something. These forms of access are essential. A product, service, environment, or system cannot be inclusive if people are functionally excluded from it. However, access is not the full picture of inclusion.

People do not experience design only as users completing tasks. They experience it as human beings with feelings, memories, anxieties, preferences, cultural associations and everyday pressures. A service may be technically accessible and still feel hostile. A form may be readable and still feel punitive. A waiting room may be physically available and still feel indifferent. A digital journey may be efficient and still leave someone feeling processed rather than understood. This explains why designing for feeling matters.

Design for feeling

Emotion is not a decorative layer added to design once function has been solved. It is part of how people interpret whether something has been designed with them in mind. We form judgements from tone, timing, language, atmosphere, material quality, service behaviour, and small signals of care. These details tell us whether an organisation sees us as people or merely as numbers, accounts, tickets or data points.

In an increasingly automated age, this distinction becomes more urgent. AI, self-service systems and digital platforms can remove friction and improve access. Used well, they can make services faster, clearer and more available. But automation can also flatten experience. It can make encounters feel generic, evasive or

emotionally weak, particularly when people are dealing with uncertainty, vulnerability or need.

A routine task may benefit from speed. But not every moment is routine. A patient using a medical device may need to feel confident and worry-free. A person contacting an energy provider may need reassurance that their home will remain warm at a fair and understandable price. Someone navigating a public service may need dignity and clarity, not just a technically functional form. A traveller whose flight has been cancelled may need guidance rather than a loop of automated responses. The emotional requirement changes by context, but the design responsibility does not.

To design for feeling is to ask questions such as: what does this person need to feel in order to participate fully? Do they need confidence, calm, privacy, recognition, control, pleasure, reassurance or trust? Where might they feel confused, exposed, rushed, dismissed or ashamed? What signals would tell them that care has been taken?

These are not “soft” questions. They shape whether people engage, return, trust, recommend, comply, learn, buy, or ask for help. They affect the quality of participation.

Design for all should therefore mean more than removing barriers. It should mean creating conditions in which people feel recognised, respected and able. It should account not only for bodies and abilities, but for emotional realities.

The most human designs are not always the most expressive or delightful. Sometimes they are quiet, restrained and clear. Sometimes they are warm and generous. Sometimes they recover a situation, or avoid making a difficult moment worse.

Designing for feeling begins with a simple act of respect: noticing that people bring their whole selves to an experience. It moves beyond considering customers as datapoints in a journey map, and rather treats them as individuals moving through moments of need, pressure, desire, memory and uncertainty. If design is truly to be for all, meeting them there is essential.



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Mary Frances "Lady" Tuble is a cybersecurity professional and project manager with more than a decade of experience in security architecture, digital transformation, and organizational development. She has led initiatives across the banking, government, and technology sectors, combining technical expertise with strong leadership and stakeholder engagement. Holding a Master's Degree in Cybersecurity with distinction, Lady is passionate about translating complex cybersecurity concepts into practical, people-centered solutions. Her work focuses on helping organizations strengthen security while fostering collaboration, innovation, and continuous learning.

Designing Inclusion

Lady Tuble

Abstract

Design is traditionally celebrated as a mechanism for solving technical problems, yet great design requires a deeper, emotional understanding of why certain individuals feel a solution was never meant for them. This article reflects on the intersection of inclusive service design and cybersecurity, shifting the focus from technical code to human vulnerability. Through the lens of lived experiences—including victims of identity theft, fraud, and small business owners left exposed by perceived complexity— it explores the psychological barriers to digital safety.

It challenges the design and security industries to look beyond market research and address the emotional core of user exclusion. By examining why so many people experience preventable harm and suffer from a learned helplessness regarding digital defense, this paper argues for an empathy-driven approach. Ultimately, it calls for inclusive security practices that foster trust, mitigate anxiety, and restore agency to ordinary people.

Keywords

Inclusive Service Design, Human-Centered Cybersecurity, Trust and Vulnerability, Psychological Safety, Emotional Usability, Preventable Harm, Digital Alienation

Introduction: Reflections on Inclusive Service Design

"Good design begins with understanding people. Great design begins with understanding why people believe something was never meant for them."

Design is often described as the process of solving problems. Throughout my career, I accepted this definition without question. If a problem could be identified, then surely the next step was to develop a better product, service, or process to solve it. Like many professionals transitioning into entrepreneurship, I believed that the greatest challenge would be creating the right solution.

I was wrong.

The most difficult part was discovering that I had been trying to solve the wrong problem.

This realization did not emerge from market research or a business strategy workshop. It emerged from years of conversations with ordinary people whose experiences continued to stay with me long after the conversations had ended. Some had lost money after unknowingly trusting fraudulent requests. Others became victims of identity theft after sharing personal information without understanding the consequences. Small business owners spoke about cyber incidents as unfortunate events that happened to "other companies," believing their own organizations were too small to become targets.

What struck me was not simply that these incidents occurred. It was how often they could have been prevented through relatively simple practices that required little or no technical expertise. These

conversations began long before I entered the cybersecurity profession, and they continued throughout my career. Gradually, they shaped the questions I found myself asking.

Why were so many people experiencing preventable harm?

More importantly, why did so many believe that protecting themselves required expertise they could never hope to possess?

Over time, I came to realize that the answer was not simply a lack of knowledge. It was a matter of perception.

Many people had already decided that cybersecurity was not for them.

Looking back, I no longer see these experiences simply as cybersecurity stories. I see them as encounters with exclusion. Not exclusion imposed by technology, regulation, or cost, but exclusion created by assumptions—assumptions about who belongs, who understands, and who deserves to participate.

This paper reflects on how those observations transformed my understanding of inclusive service design. While the context of my journey is cybersecurity, the lessons extend far beyond it. They raise a broader question that designers across disciplines may wish to consider:

How do we design for people who have already decided they do not belong?

When Expertise Becomes a Barrier

When people hear the word cybersecurity, they often imagine highly technical professionals monitoring networks, responding to cyberattacks, or writing complex code. During countless conversations with friends, family members, business owners, and professionals outside the technology industry, I encountered the same response repeatedly.

"I'm not an IT person."

"I wouldn't understand it."

"That's for big companies."

"We can't afford that."

These statements fascinated me because they revealed something deeper than a lack of knowledge. They revealed an identity.

People were not saying they were unwilling to learn. They were saying they did not see themselves as the kind of person who belonged in the conversation.

This distinction became increasingly important to me.

The irony is that many of the practices that reduce digital risk require remarkably little technical knowledge. Enabling multi-factor authentication, recognizing phishing attempts, verifying requests before transferring money, managing passwords responsibly, or creating clear policies within a small business are not advanced technical skills. They are everyday behaviours.

Yet those behaviours often remain absent because people believe the entire subject lies beyond their reach.

As Donald Norman argues in *The Design of Everyday Things*, good design should reduce the need for users to adapt themselves to the system. When people repeatedly conclude that they are "not technical enough," perhaps the failure is not entirely educational. Perhaps the way we communicate specialized knowledge unintentionally asks people to adapt before they have even begun.

The challenge, then, is not merely simplifying information. It is designing experiences that invite participation.

Designing the Wrong Solution

When I decided to explore entrepreneurship, I believed I already understood the problem.

I imagined the challenge would be designing a service that made specialized knowledge more accessible. Like many aspiring founders, I immersed myself in books, podcasts, articles, startup communities, business frameworks, and product development methodologies. Every source seemed valuable. Every founder appeared to offer a different roadmap to success. Every article introduced another framework that I felt I needed to master.

Instead of gaining clarity, I became overwhelmed.

I found myself asking questions that extended far beyond business planning.

"Am I capable of building something on my own?"

"What if someone else has already done this?"

"Where do I even begin?"

Eventually, I stopped working on the business altogether.

Looking back, I recognize something almost ironic about this period of my life.

I had become the very person I hoped one day to design for.

No one had prevented me from becoming a founder. There was no gatekeeper telling me I lacked the necessary qualifications. Yet I had convinced myself that there was simply too much to know before I could begin.

I had excluded myself.

That realization became one of the most important moments in my journey.

The emotional barriers I had observed in others—intimidation, uncertainty, perceived complexity, and the feeling of not belonging—were not unique to cybersecurity. They were universal human experiences.

For the first time, I began to wonder whether the real design problem was not technical complexity at all.

Perhaps it was the experience of standing at the edge of an unfamiliar world and believing that it belonged to someone else.

Learning to Listen Differently

As I continued exploring entrepreneurship, I sought advice from founders whose businesses had succeeded and from others whose ventures had failed.

Their experiences differed dramatically, yet one piece of advice appeared repeatedly.

"Just do it and keep learning."

Initially, I interpreted this as encouragement to stop overthinking.

Only later did I understand its significance from a design perspective.

No one could tell me exactly what my future service should become because the design process itself depended on continuous learning. This is precisely why concepts such as the Minimum Viable Product and iterative design exist. They acknowledge that meaningful solutions emerge through repeated interaction with people rather than through perfect planning.

The role of the designer is therefore not simply to create answers. It is to remain open to changing the question.

My own question was changing.

I no longer asked, "How can I teach people more?"

Instead, I found myself asking,

"Why do people believe this conversation is not for them in the first place?"

That subtle shift transformed everything that followed.



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Louie Angsico is a dedicated advocate of self-awareness, using it as a foundation to help individuals create intentional life choices and influence others. He designs and delivers structured learning solutions for leaders from middle management to the C-suite globally, spanning the Philippines, Asia, the Americas, and Europe. As a coach, Louie utilizes a holistic, somatic approach to connect mind, heart, and body, creating a safe space for sustainable change. Drawing from forty years of martial arts experience and international competitive athletics, he uniquely integrates physical practices to enrich and energize his training environments.

Designing Inclusive Interventions to Access Emotion in Leadership Development

Louie Angsico

Abstract

Traditional leadership development interventions frequently focus on cognitive competencies, technical expertise, and explicit behaviours. However, lasting professional transformation under conditions of systemic pressure, uncertainty, and change often requires navigating the underlying emotional realities that shape human response. This article argues that emotions should be treated not as threats to objectivity, but as vital data reflecting institutional values, relationships, and risks. Rather than demanding direct emotional disclosure, which corporate cultures frequently translate into detached analytical language, the authors propose a framework of non-linear pathways to emotional awareness. Drawing on case studies across diverse organizational contexts—including infrastructure project leadership, corporate acquisitions, and high-efficiency customer service environments—this paper illustrates how inclusive interventions utilizing somatic practices, metaphorical storytelling, image selection, and intentional presence can safely unlock hidden emotional information. Ultimately, the authors demonstrate that sustainable professional development requires simultaneous attention to individual self-awareness and the systemic environments that either support or inhibit human connection.

Keywords

Leadership Development, Inclusive Interventions, Emotional Access, Somatic Practice, Organisational Systems, Professional Expertise, Psychological Safety

Introduction: The role emotions play in leadership

Through our work with leaders, teams, and global organisations across different industries and cultures, we have become increasingly curious about the role that emotions play in leadership effectiveness. Much of leadership development continues to focus on what leaders should know, the competencies they should demonstrate, and the behaviours they should exhibit. These remain important. Yet our experience suggests that knowledge alone is often not enough to create lasting change.

The real test of leadership tends to emerge in moments of pressure, uncertainty, conflict, change, or significant risk. These are the moments when carefully learned models become harder to access and our habitual patterns begin to take over. It is also in these moments that emotions appear to play a significant role. Emotions influence what we pay attention to, how we interpret situations, what risks we perceive, how we relate to others, and ultimately how we respond.

One observation has appeared repeatedly in our work. Most people do not lack emotions. Rather, they have become highly skilled at translating emotions into more acceptable organisational language. Frustration becomes an accountability issue. Anxiety becomes risk management. Fear becomes a strategic concern. Disappointment

becomes a problem with execution. Emotions are present, but they often remain hidden beneath analysis, problem solving, expertise, and action.

This raises the following points:

- **How can we help people recognise the patterns that shape their responses?**
- **How can we work within an organisation's existing language and culture while gently expanding what becomes possible?**
- **How can we help people access the emotions that lie beneath their thoughts and behaviours?**
- **How can we support people to remain present, curious, and resourceful when difficult emotions arise?**
- **How can we create psychologically safe, inclusive environments where every participant has a choice in how they engage?**

This insight has fundamentally influenced how we design leadership and organisational development interventions. We have learned that helping people access emotions is rarely achieved by asking directly, “How do you feel?” Many leaders and professionals are more comfortable with analysis, decision-making, and problem solving than emotional exploration. Instead, we create multiple pathways into awareness. We begin with experience before emotion. We invite reflection before discussion. We use stories, metaphors, images, movement, dialogue, and somatic practices. We explore stakeholder perspectives. We normalise emotions as another form of information rather than something that threatens objectivity. Just as data tells us something about a system, emotions can tell us something about values, relationships, needs, opportunities, and risks.

Accessing Emotion Through the Body

Our expertise is one of our greatest assets, but it can also become one of our biggest blind spots. The more we identify with having the answers, the harder it becomes to notice the assumptions, emotions, and habits shaping our decisions.

One of the challenges we occasionally encounter in leadership development is not a lack of capability, motivation, or intelligence. It is the PRESENCE of expertise.

We were approached by the coach and facilitator supporting a regional leadership team of a multinational infrastructure firm. These leaders were participating in a broader leadership development and coaching initiative designed to prepare them to lead a complex and growing region. They were experienced, technically competent, commercially successful, and highly respected. Yet the coaches and facilitators found themselves struggling to engage the group.

The participants approached many conversations as experts. They were quick to offer opinions, challenge ideas, solve problems, and explain why something would or would not work. While these qualities had undoubtedly contributed to their success, they also created distance from their emotional experience. Conversations remained at the level of expertise and analysis. Curiosity, vulnerability, and self-awareness were harder to access.

Rather than asking how to help them learn more, we became interested in helping them notice what was happening beneath the expertise.

We designed a one-day intervention focused less on leadership concepts and more on leadership behaviour. Through breathing and pausing practices, boxing drills, martial arts exercises, and video observation, participants experienced themselves under pressure. Some became more controlling. Others withdrew. Some rushed ahead. Others struggled to trust or collaborate. What became visible were not simply behaviours, but the emotions influencing those behaviours: frustration, defensiveness, anxiety, impatience, uncertainty, and the need to stay in control.

For many participants, awareness emerged not through discussion but through embodied experience. The body became a pathway to emotional information that had been difficult to access through conversation alone.

Accessing Emotion Through Story, Image, and Symbol

When uncertainty rises, our instinct is often to protect ourselves. We hold back our thoughts, guard our emotions, and seek certainty where we can. Yet these are precisely the moments when organisations need conversations that are grounded in trust rather than control.

We were asked to support a one-day meeting for a technology company that had recently been acquired.

The acquisition had created uncertainty throughout the organisation. Employees were wondering what the changes would mean for their careers, their teams, and the future of the company. The HR team wanted people to have a voice, but they were understandably concerned about how conversations might unfold, particularly with union representatives participating in the session.

As we explored the situation, it became clear that the emotions were already present. There was hope, anxiety, curiosity, excitement, scepticism, and concern. The challenge was helping people access and express those emotions in a way that felt constructive and safe.

Rather than designing a session around emotional disclosure, we designed a process around participation. The senior leader shared the story behind the acquisition and his vision for the future. Participants then provided questions, concerns, observations, and suggestions through a structured feedback process that ensured every voice could be heard.

We also invited participants to select images that represented their hopes and fears for their careers and the future of the organisation. Rather than asking people directly what they felt, we asked them to tell the story behind the image they chose. The images became a bridge into emotions that were difficult to articulate directly. Through stories, metaphors, and symbols, people expressed aspirations, concerns, losses, and possibilities that might otherwise have remained hidden.

What emerged was not conflict but understanding. Employees felt heard. Leaders gained insight. Emotions that had been sitting beneath the surface became available as information that could help the organisation navigate change.

Accessing Emotion Through Presence and Connection

We have the capacity for empathy, curiosity, and connection. These qualities may become inaccessible when speed, pressure, and performance dominate the environment. The question is not whether

we care, but whether the system we are in gives us the space to express that care.

A BPO organisation asked us to improve customer experience by helping agents demonstrate greater care and connection during customer interactions.

After observing agents on the floor, reviewing their processes, examining their training programs, and understanding their working environment, we realised the issue was not simply a communication skills challenge. The entire system had been designed for efficiency. Success was measured through turnaround times, call handling metrics, productivity targets, and adherence to process. Training focused heavily on product knowledge, procedures, and standard responses. Agents had become highly skilled at following scripts and pre-prepared spiels.

What we observed was not a lack of care. Many agents genuinely wanted to help customers. The challenge was that the pace and structure of the system made it difficult for them to access and express that care consistently.

Rather than introducing more scripts, we focused on helping agents reconnect with qualities that were already present. We introduced improvisation exercises, breathing and pausing practices between calls, intention-setting before customer interactions, empathetic listening, and open questioning. These practices helped agents slow down, become more present, and reconnect with the human being on the other end of the conversation.

Gradually, agents moved from performing customer care to accessing and expressing genuine care. Yet this experience also revealed something important. While the agents changed, the broader system continued to shape their behaviour. This led us to engage leaders in conversations about whether the environment supported or inhibited access to the very qualities the organisation wanted to see.

Accessing What Is Already There

Across these very different situations, one lesson continues to emerge. Helping people access emotions is rarely about encouraging emotional expression for its own sake. It is about helping people access information that may otherwise remain outside their awareness.

Whether we are working with senior executives, with leaders navigating organisational change, or with frontline employees serving customers, the emotions are already there. The challenge is creating conditions that help people notice them, work with them, and learn from them. Sometimes the pathway is through paying attention to bodily sensations. Sometimes it is through stories, images, and symbols. Sometimes it is through presence, reflection, and human connection. The intervention changes, but the intention remains the same.

Perhaps the most important learning for us is that sustainable development happens when we pay attention to both people and systems. Individuals can learn new ways of noticing, relating, and responding, but lasting change is more likely when the environments around them reinforce those behaviours. Leadership development, therefore, is not only about developing more capable leaders. It is

also about creating the conditions in which people can access the full range of information available to them, including the information carried by their emotions.

When people gain access to that information, they often become more aware of themselves, more attuned to others, and more intentional in their choices. And when organisations create space for that awareness to emerge, they become better equipped to navigate complexity, uncertainty, and change with greater clarity, care, and wisdom.

A Parting Gift: Growing What Is Already There

Here are some questions you may want to consider to get you started for your daily practice:

Self-awareness

- **What am I noticing in myself right now?**
- **What emotions, assumptions, or biases might be shaping how I see this situation?**
- **Where do I feel certainty? Where am I curious?**

The Experience

- **Who is thriving? Who is struggling?**
- **What might each person care about that I haven't fully understood?**
- **Who hasn't spoken yet?**

Relationships

- **Which relationships are helping this system work?**
- **Which relationships need strengthening?**
- **Where is collaboration flowing naturally?**

Attention to the System

- **What patterns keep repeating?**
- **What structures, policies, or incentives are producing these behaviours?**
- **What is the system rewarding?**

Purpose

- **What are we ultimately trying to achieve?**
- **How does this decision serve our purpose?**
- **Who benefits if we succeed?**

Possibilities

-
- **What are we not considering?**
- **What would be possible if we approached this differently?**
- **Where is the opportunity hidden inside this challenge?**



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Purva Sawant is a product designer, graphic designer, illustrator, and brand strategist working across systems, technology, and visual culture. With over a decade of experience, she designs products and experiences that make complex systems more approachable, with a particular interest in trust, accessibility, and human-centered design. Her work spans organizations including UNICEF and UNDP, alongside global consultancies and technology platforms, where she explores the intersection of design, emotion, and the ways people experience the world. Her recent writing explores belonging, care, and emotional accessibility as emerging dimensions of inclusive design.

Beyond Function: The Emotional Layer of Universal Design

Purva Sawant

Abstract

Universal design has made significant progress in removing physical and digital barriers. Yet access and belonging are not the same thing. A person can enter a space and still feel they were never meant to be there. This article proposes that the emotional dimension of environments represents an underexplored frontier for inclusive design. Drawing on recent neuroscience research on Visual Valence (Sadeghi & Anderson, 2025), which demonstrates that the brain decodes emotional tone directly from basic visual properties such as colour, shape, and composition before higher-level cognition occurs, the article proposes that warmth, invitation, and calm are not aesthetic choices but neurological signals. Through a series of spaces, a department store, a hospital waiting room, a school cafeteria, the article traces the gap between entry and belonging, and examines why that gap resists the measurement tools that have driven accessibility progress. It concludes that the designer's role is not to engineer belonging but to create the conditions from which it can emerge, and asks whether invitation-forward design might become the next standard we hold ourselves to.

Keywords

Universal Design, Accessibility, Belonging, Care, Emotional Design, Visual Valence, Inclusive Design, Human-Centered Design

Introduction: Making people feel like they are supposed to be there

We have become remarkably good at designing spaces people can enter. Ramps, contrast ratios, legible wayfinding, navigable interfaces: these are real achievements, and they matter.

But, there is a question that sits just past the threshold of access, one that our specification sheets rarely ask: once someone enters, do they feel like they were supposed to be there?

This is not a soft question. It is, I would argue, the next hard problem of universal design.

These simple daily experiences (the restaurant where the host makes you feel unwelcome, the neighbourhood cafe where the barista knows your name) made me think about what it means to design for people in an ultra-efficient world. We are on a mission to achieve something close to machine-like perfection: optimised flows, frictionless journeys, measurable outcomes. In doing so, we sometimes forget that people do not only experience the world functionally. We experience it emotionally. And emotional experience is universal.

What the Visual Brain Already Knows

In 2025, researchers Saeedeh Sadeghi and Adam Anderson published findings in Nature Communications introducing the concept of Visual Valence: the idea that basic visual properties such as colour, shape, and composition generate feelings of positive or negative valence directly, before higher-level cognitive processing occurs. Their model, trained on nearly 8,000 photographs, predicted emotional tone from abstract visual features alone, without recognizing any objects or

scenes. When tested on abstract paintings, it performed even more accurately, suggesting that how we feel in a space has as much to do with what our visual system absorbs as with what we consciously register.

fMRI (*Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging*) data from the study confirmed that visual valence activates early visual processing regions of the brain, rather than higher-order cognitive regions. The researchers also found that the brain responds most positively to natural scenes and living organisms, while human-made environments tend toward more negative responses, consistent with the concept of biophilia.

For designers, the implication is direct: warmth, softness, invitation, and calm are not decorative preferences. They are neurological signals. The visual properties of a space are already speaking to people's nervous systems before a single conscious thought about the room has formed.

If that is true, designing for emotional resonance is not an aesthetic luxury. It may be a form of access.



Architettura sintetica di uomo (Uomo con i baffi). 1916-191. Depero Fortunato (1892 - 1960). Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Trento and Rovereto's (MART) collection

Access Is Not the Same as Belonging

Consider this scene: You push the door and walk into a high-end department store for the first time. The luxury shoe brands are upstairs; the mid-range brands are on the ground floor. You don't know that yet. You miss the signage and take the escalator up. There is ambient music. Each brand display has its own signature fragrance. You can feel the staff watching you as you scan for something that isn't there.

A woman in her late sixties, with red butterfly-wing glasses and a dress suit, approaches. Her tone is calibrated, polite but probing. She is trying to determine whether you are lost or whether you simply don't belong here. She redirects you downstairs. You begin your descent, wondering whether you were ever supposed to come up.

You had access. The door opened. The escalator worked. No physical barrier blocked you. And yet something failed. Inclusion can break down not at the entrance, but in the atmosphere.

Now imagine a different space: a hospital emergency waiting room. Everyone there has access. The chairs are arranged, the signs are clear, and the receptionist is present. But what does the room feel like? Fluorescent overhead lighting. Hard plastic seating. A television mounted too high, cycling through daytime programming. A space designed for function, perhaps unintentionally for endurance rather than comfort. People arrive carrying one of the heaviest emotional realities a body can hold. What does the design say to them?

Or a college cafeteria on the first day. A student with no established social footing walks in carrying a tray and scans for a place to sit. The room is accessible. But whether it feels survivable is another question entirely.

These are not niche cases. Every designed space makes implicit claims about who it expects. And those claims are communicated not through signage but through the visual and sensory environment, exactly the channel that Visual Valence research tells us operates before conscious thought.



Photo by Tasha Kostyuk on Unsplash

We Measure What Is Easy to Measure

Universal design has made enormous progress by identifying and removing barriers. Many of these barriers are visible, measurable, and actionable: doorway widths, contrast ratios, ramp gradients, keyboard navigation paths. This work is essential. It is also incomplete.

Belonging is much harder to quantify. And so we tend not to. We have become very good at measuring what is easy to measure. But some of the most meaningful aspects of human experience resist specification. Feeling safe. Feeling seen. Feeling like a space was designed with you in mind. These qualities rarely appear in design

briefs. Yet they often determine whether people return, participate, or feel that they belong.

What if we asked, more deliberately, what emotional events our spaces are actually holding? Airports hold reunion and separation simultaneously: arrivals flooded with anticipation, departures carrying grief. Libraries host curiosity and concentration. Schools host confidence and its absence. We are trained to design for function. But people enter every space carrying a magnitude of emotion. The space responds to them through the same visual channels the brain uses to decode feeling. Whether we intended to say something or not, we already did.

A wheelchair ramp is designed once. Care and hospitality are designed every day. That asymmetry is worth sitting with.

Belonging Cannot Be Engineered. It Can Be Invited.

If belonging is a feeling, designers cannot manufacture it. We can never fully guarantee it. What we can do is create the conditions that make it more likely, reducing the emotional distance between entering a space and feeling that you are welcome in it.

This shifts the designer's role in an important way. We are not the authors of someone's idea of belonging. We are the architects of its possibility. Our individual choices (lighting temperature, material warmth, spatial proportion, the tone of wayfinding language, and how sound moves through a room) do not create belonging on their own. Together, they establish a system. Belonging emerges from that system, or it doesn't. It isn't engineered. It emerges.

What if belonging became a success metric? Not the only one, not a replacement for accessibility standards, but a genuine question in the brief: did people feel this space was made for them? Viewing a project through that lens changes what you notice. It makes you attend to transitions between spaces, to the emotional register of materials, to whether the language on signage addresses people or processes them. Suddenly, design's role extends to reducing emotional distance, not just physical friction.

This is not about aesthetics. It is not about making spaces prettier. It is about recognising that the visual environment is already in conversation with people's nervous systems the moment they arrive. The question is whether that conversation is welcoming or alienating, and whether we designed it intentionally or by default.

Conclusion: From Permission to Invitation

The future of universal design, I think, is not about perfecting the environment. It is about expanding what we believe the environment owes people.

Accessibility comes first. It allows people to enter. But entry is not the same as arrival. Between the door and the feeling of belonging, there is a gap that ramps and contrast ratios were not built to close. That gap is emotional, and it is real, and it is shaped by the same visual properties that neuroscience now tells us the brain processes before interpretation begins.

As designers, our role has always involved more than specification. It has involved imagining the person on the other side of every decision, not just whether they can use the space, but how they will feel when they do.

The next question is not only: can anyone access this? It is: does this space extend an invitation? Does it say, in the language of light and material and proportion and sound, that the person standing in it was expected, considered, welcomed?

What if the standard we held ourselves to was not just barrier-free, but invitation-forward? Not just accessible, but worth arriving at.

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Softness as Counter-Model: What Brand Design Owes the Full Human Being

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Abstract

The optimisation economy has produced not only exhausted individuals but a culture of emotional narrowness. This essay argues that affective optimisation - and its brand expression, optimised wellness - is not a counter-model to that narrowness but its most sophisticated extension: the instrumentalisation of feeling in service of a perpetually deferred, improved future self. Drawing on research conducted for *In Defence of Softness*, a cultural zine exploring embodied human experience as a counterforce to optimisation logic, the essay proposes that emotional range constitutes an unaddressed dimension of Universal Design. To design only for calm delight is to presuppose a standard emotional state in the same way a stepped entrance presupposes a standard body. Brand design, operating at the scale and intimacy of daily life, is one of the primary sites where a genuine counter-model could be built - not through the optimisation of feeling, but through environments capacious enough to receive the full human being, in the present tense of actual experience.

Keywords: *Universal Design, emotional access, brand design, optimisation economy, affective optimisation, softness, dynamic range, inclusive design, embodied experience*

Introduction

There is no shortage of brands willing to tell you that you need to recover. The past decade has produced an entire industry organised around the premise that the modern self is depleted and that the right combination of products, practices, and tracking will restore it. Whoop monitors your recovery score. Eight Sleep optimises your sleep stages. AG1 fills your nutritional gaps. Calm delivers your meditation. The language is consistently one of care, restoration, and return to wholeness - and the market is enormous, growing, and deeply sincere in its own terms.

But look more closely at the underlying logic and something important becomes visible. These brands do not actually depart from the optimisation economy. They extend it inward. The premise of every one of them is identical to the premise of the achievement culture they claim to offer relief from: that you are a system with inefficiencies to be corrected, that your present self is insufficient, and that the goal is a measurably improved future self. Rest, in this framework, is not valuable in itself. It is a recoverable asset - something you do in order to perform better tomorrow. The cold plunge, the cashmere, the adaptogenic supplement: these are permitted indulgences, carefully positioned as investments in future output. They are softness instrumentalised.

This is what might be called affective optimisation - the capture of the cultural hunger for restoration, repackaged as a more sophisticated form of optimisation. Its brand expression is optimised wellness: the performance of care in service of a self that is always, by definition,

not yet good enough. It is not a counter-model to the optimisation economy. It is the optimisation economy's most elegant product.

The distinction that matters - and that optimised wellness systematically obscures - is between the future tense and the present tense of feeling. Optimisation is always future-facing: you track, improve, and invest in a better version of yourself that has not yet arrived. Softness, in the sense this essay will argue for, is present-tense: it is what is here, now, in the body, in the encounter, in the emotional reality of this moment. It cannot be tracked toward an outcome because it is not a means to one. It is the thing itself.

That distinction is not a philosophical nicety. It is the difference between a designed environment that makes room for a full human being to arrive, and one that offers a refined set of tools for that human being to work on themselves.

The Optimisation Economy and Its Emotional Cost

To understand why affective optimisation is so seductive - and so insufficient - it is necessary to understand what it is responding to. The optimisation economy, as the organising logic of late capitalism, has produced a specific kind of human subject. Philosopher Byung-Chul Han describes this figure in *The Burnout Society* (2010) as the "achievement subject": an individual who has internalised the imperative of performance so thoroughly that coercion becomes indistinguishable from freedom. The achievement subject does not rest because she is forbidden to. She does not rest because she cannot imagine why she would. Exhaustion, Han argues, is not an aberration of this system. It is its logical endpoint.

The consequences extend beyond the individual. Sociologist Jonathan Crary, in *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2013), traces how the dissolution of boundaries between work and non-work time has systematically eroded the biological and social conditions for restoration - sleep, rest, unstructured presence. These are not incidental losses. As the researcher Tara White argues in *In Defence of Softness* - a cultural zine I produced exploring softness, delicacy, and embodied human experience as a counterforce to optimisation logic - the industrial model is biologically incoherent at its foundation. Humans are not isolated productive units. We are embodied and embedded beings who co-regulate one another's nervous systems, who require rest, pause, and the full range of emotional experience to maintain coherence. States like grief, awe, love, and heartbreak are not interruptions to functioning. They are, White argues, how meaning is made - how neural networks reorganise, how the self is continually revised.

What the optimisation economy suppresses, in other words, is not weakness. It is biology. And the cultural apparatus that enforces that suppression is not only economic. It is designed.

Optimised wellness understands this - partially. It sees the exhaustion, correctly identifies the hunger for something different, and offers a solution. But because it cannot imagine a logic outside optimisation, the solution it offers is more optimisation: more precise, more personalised, more attuned to the individual's specific deficiencies. It mistakes the mechanism of the problem for its cure. The achievement subject, offered a recovery score, does not rest. She optimises her rest. The present tense of feeling - the biological and

emotional reality that White argues is the actual site of human coherence - remains, in this framework, permanently deferred.

How Brand Design Absorbed the Industrial Model

Arlie Hochschild's foundational work *The Managed Heart* (1983) introduced the concept of emotional labour - the management of feeling as a condition of employment, particularly in service industries. Hochschild's concern was with individuals required to perform emotional states on behalf of institutions. Four decades later, the dynamic has inverted: it is institutions - brands - that now perform emotional states on behalf of, and increasingly in place of, authentic human feeling. The brand voice has become one of the primary emotional registers of public life.

That voice, across the past two decades, has converged on a striking uniformity - and optimised wellness has not disrupted that uniformity so much as perfected it. The mechanisms are structural. Algorithmic optimisation - the A/B testing and engagement metrics governing digital brand experience - systematically selects for the least-polarising emotional response. Affect theorist Sara Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), argues that certain emotional orientations are institutionally privileged over others - that cultures, like bodies, lean toward particular feelings and away from others. Brand culture has learned to lean hard: toward warmth, frictionlessness, and a performed calm that bears little relationship to the texture of actual human experience.

Global scale compounds the narrowing. Brands operating across multiple markets cannot sustain the emotional specificity of particular cultures, histories, or registers of humour. The result is a lowest

common denominator of feeling - a universal blandness that mistakes inoffensiveness for inclusivity. Optimised wellness adds a premium layer to this blandness: the carefully art-directed linen, the considered typography, the founder's note about their own burnout journey. The aesthetic of restoration without its substance.

The cumulative effect is brand environments of considerable technical sophistication and pronounced emotional impoverishment. They permit, effectively, a single feeling: calm delight held in reserve for a future self who has done the work. They exclude grief, irreverence, awe, longing, sharp humour, productive discomfort - any feeling that cannot be recruited into the project of self-improvement. They model a human subject whose emotional life has been pre-approved, and in doing so exclude everyone whose inner life does not conform to that model. Which is, at some point in any given day, everyone.

The Missing Dimension in Universal Design

Universal Design, as articulated by architect Ron Mace and colleagues at North Carolina State University in 1997, proposes that environments, products, and communications should be designed to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design. Its seven principles - equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive operation among them - have been enormously generative in expanding physical and cognitive accessibility. Ramps, legible typography, screen readers, plain language: these are the material achievements of a framework that refuses to design only for the standard-case user.

But Universal Design has a missing dimension. Its principles have been applied extensively to physical and cognitive access, and far less

to emotional access. The question of whether a designed environment makes room for the full range of human emotional experience - whether it presupposes a standard emotional state in the same way a stepped entrance presupposes a standard body - has not yet been systematically posed within the field.

It needs to be. The exclusion produced by emotional uniformity is real, if less visible than a missing ramp. And optimised wellness makes it worse, not better: by promising emotional restoration while delivering emotional deferral, it deepens the premise that the present emotional self - the one that is grieving, or irreverent, or awestruck, or uncertain - is a problem to be solved rather than a person to be met. The present tense of feeling, which is where actual human beings actually live, remains undesignated for.

The exclusion produced by emotional uniformity is not a matter of edge cases. It is the condition of any human being moving through an actual life - which is to say, through grief and joy and ambivalence and anger and the thousand emotional states that optimisation culture has no category for. To design only for calm delight is not to design for a majority and accommodate a minority. It is to design for a moment - a brief, fortunate, temporary moment - and to treat everything outside it as a deviation. Universal Design has always refused that logic when applied to bodies and minds. The argument here is that it must refuse it equally when applied to feeling.

Tara White's framework, developed across In Defence of Softness, offers a direct formulation: softness as dynamic range made visible. Not passivity, not the absence of force, but a system's capacity to flex, absorb, and return - what she contrasts with rigidity, which produces fragility at every scale. The present tense of feeling is where that

dynamic range lives. It is immediate, embodied, and cannot be optimised into existence. Applied to design, the principle is unambiguous: a designed environment that can hold only one emotional register - or that treats the present emotional state as raw material for future improvement - is not soft in this sense. It is rigid. And rigidity, as White argues, is not strength. It is a failure mode.

Brand Design as Counter-Model

The question, then, is what designing for emotional range actually looks like - and whether brand design is capable of it.

There is evidence that it is. Not systematically, and not yet as a conscious application of Universal Design principles, but in isolated cases where brands have resisted the pull toward emotional uniformity and built something more capacious. Patagonia's communication has long operated across registers that mainstream brand culture avoids: environmental grief, moral anger, the particular melancholy of watching something irreplaceable disappear. These are not comfortable feelings. They are not optimised for conversion, and they bear no relationship to the logic of optimised wellness - they do not promise that engaging with them will make you a better version of yourself. They simply ask you to feel what is true. The quality of attachment they produce - and the quality of trust - is of a different order than frictionless warmth, because they treat the audience as people capable of bearing difficult emotions rather than consumers who must be protected from, or improved beyond, them. Oatly's designed awkwardness performs a related function from a different direction: by allowing a brand voice to be uncertain, self-contradictory, and occasionally absurd, it makes room for the reader's

own ambivalence. It does not demand a single emotional response. It does not promise a better future self. It meets the present one.

These are not simply creative strategies. They are, in the terms this essay has been developing, acts of emotional inclusion. They expand the range of inner lives that can find themselves reflected in a designed environment. They refuse the assumption of a standard emotional state - and equally, the assumption of a standard emotional destination.

What distinguishes them structurally from both the optimised norm and the optimised wellness response to it is not the presence of difficulty - grief or anger or awkwardness for their own sake - but what Hochschild's framework would recognise as authenticity of feeling: emotional expression that serves genuine communication rather than organisational management or individual improvement. The distinction matters because it points toward a principle rather than an aesthetic. Designing for emotional range does not mean designing for darkness, or for the performance of authenticity. It means designing systems flexible enough to hold more than one register - brand voices with tonal range rather than tonal consistency, identities that can shift with emotional intelligence rather than algorithmic caution, experiences that build in space for the unexpected feeling rather than engineering it toward a predetermined resolution.

This is, notably, a harder design problem than optimisation. Optimisation has a clear objective function: minimise friction, maximise positive sentiment, reduce abandonment. Emotional range has no single metric. It requires judgment about what a full human being actually needs from an encounter with a designed environment

- which is precisely the kind of judgment Universal Design has always asked of its practitioners. Mace's original formulation was not "design for the average user, efficiently." It was design for all people, to the greatest extent possible. The extent possible, in emotional terms, is considerably greater than current practice suggests.

Caring as a Design Principle

Universal Design has always been, at its foundation, an ethical commitment before it is a technical one. The impulse behind it - the refusal to treat certain bodies, certain minds, certain ways of moving through the world as aberrations to be accommodated rather than lives to be served - is an impulse of care. Not care as sentiment, and not care as the optimised wellness industry's version of it - the personalised supplement protocol, the curated recovery ritual - but care as structural orientation: the decision to begin design from the full range of human experience rather than from a convenient abstraction of it.

Caring, in this sense, is not only what we look for in designed relationships - it is what makes those relationships possible at all.

Byung-Chul Han, in *The Agony of Eros* (2012), argues that the logic of optimisation is fundamentally a logic of the same - it eliminates otherness, difference, the friction of genuine encounter. What it cannot produce is what Han calls the experience of the other: something that resists assimilation, that demands a response rather than a conversion. Care, in this sense, requires the capacity to be altered by what you encounter. A designed environment that has been optimised against surprise, against discomfort, against the full range of human feeling - or that has repackaged those things as inputs to a

self-improvement protocol - has also been optimised against care. It has replaced the encounter with a service.

This is the deepest connection between the emotional argument and Universal Design's mission. The principles Mace articulated were not only about ramps and legible type. They were about the refusal to design a world that implicitly tells certain people: you do not belong here in your full complexity. The emotional equivalent of that refusal is the refusal to design environments - brand or otherwise - that tell people: your grief does not belong here, your irreverence does not belong here, your awe is inconvenient, your present feeling is a problem we can help you optimise away.

Tara White puts it plainly in In Defence of Softness: "Softness is dynamic range made visible." A designed environment with genuine dynamic range - one that can hold tenderness and difficulty, celebration and loss, humour and gravity, and the full presence of whoever arrives - is practising a form of hospitality that no optimisation algorithm can produce and no recovery score can measure. It is not preparing you for a better future self. It is making room for the self that is here.

Conclusion

We return, at the close, to the threshold moment White identifies. People are seeking alternatives - somatic practices, rest, frameworks that name what the optimisation economy costs them - because the body has its own intelligence about what it can and cannot endure. "The halt is an insistence," she says in our conversation. "A body saying, I cannot endure this level of hardness indefinitely." That insistence, scaled to a culture, is what the current hunger for softness

represents. Not a trend. Not a consumer preference. Not, crucially, a market opportunity for a more sophisticated form of the same logic. A biological and social system pushing back against a model that has asked too much of it for too long - and pushing back, equally, against the industries that have learned to profit from the pushback while leaving the model intact.

Design has always had a role in how cultures organise their values into lived experience. The built environment, the communicative environment, the brand environment - these are not neutral surfaces. They encode assumptions about who belongs, what is normal, what a human being is for, and what state a human being ought to be in. Universal Design's contribution has been to make those assumptions visible and to insist they be revised in the direction of inclusion.

The argument of this essay is that emotional range belongs in that revision - and that the revision must be distinguished, clearly and deliberately, from the optimisation of emotional range, which is simply the achievement subject's next project. Designing for the full spectrum of human feeling - across ages, abilities, cultures, and life circumstances, and in the present tense of actual experience rather than the future tense of projected improvement - is not a refinement of Universal Design's principles but an expression of their deepest logic. Brand design, operating at the scale and intimacy of daily life, is one of the places where a genuine counter-model could be built. Not through the rejection of craft or commercial purpose. Through the expansion of what counts as the full human being a designed environment is obliged to serve - and the insistence that serving them means meeting them where they are, not guiding them toward where they ought to be.

We are still naming the counter-model. That naming is itself a design problem. And it begins, as all good design does, with the refusal to assume a standard user - and the refusal, equally, to assume that the standard user simply needs better tools to become a less standard one.

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Dr. Tom Guarriello

Tom is a clinical psychologist who helps organizations develop innovative, customer-focused strategies in rapidly changing environments. After twenty years as a clinician and mental health executive, he shifted focus in 1989 to helping leaders improve performance by deeply understanding customer culture and behavior. From 1994 to 2019, he also co-led the consultancy TrueTalk, Inc.

Fascinated by technology's psychological impact, Tom served on the inaugural YouTube Community Council in 2006 and later launched RoboPsych.com to explore human-robot interaction. He has advised diverse brands, from Victoria's Secret to the Harvard Business Review. Additionally, Tom is a Founding Faculty Member in the Masters in Branding program at New York's School of Visual Arts, where he teaches the psychology of branding. He resides in Princeton, New Jersey.

Tom's recent book is titled" *The Meaning of Branded Objects: Why Some Things Matter More Than Others.*

Why So Emotional?

Dr. Tom Guarriello

Abstract

This article explores the psychological and social drivers behind intense consumer loyalty to specific brands, such as Apple vs. Android or Ford vs. Chevy. While competing products often offer nearly identical functional capabilities, consumers frequently exhibit fierce emotional attachments to one over the other. Utilizing the "jobs-to-be-done" framework proposed by Clayton Christensen et al., the author demonstrates that product selection extends far beyond utility. Instead, consumer choices are heavily driven by the social signals a product sends to others and the emotional alignment it shares with a consumer's personal identity. Ultimately, the article argues that branded objects function as extensions of ourselves, satisfying core human needs for belonging, esteem, and self-actualization by unconsciously bridging the gap between product performance and self-identity.

Keywords: *Consumer Behavior, Brand Loyalty, Jobs-to-be-Done, Identity, Emotional Marketing, Material Culture.*

Our relationships with objects

Our relationships with objects reveal an important aspect of human nature.

Quick: which one do you prefer?

- iPhone or Android?**
- Coke or Pepsi?**
- Chevy or Ford?**

Your answers to these questions are likely to reveal strong preferences for one of the pair over the other.

Why?

Is there really much difference between a Samsung Galaxy S25 and an iPhone 17?

They both perform practically identical tasks. They're both more than capable of handling our everyday smartphone requirements. So, what is it that elicits such strong reactions by customers of one or the other device?

Those reactions tell us that there's more to our connections with objects than their ability to perform certain functions. In their now-classic 2005 Harvard Business Review article: Marketing Malpractice: The Cause and The Cure, Clayton Christensen, Scott Cook and Taddy Hall proposed a model to help brand professionals understand the dynamics of consumer choices. Mostly, they said, we don't simply buy products. Instead, we hire them to perform jobs for us. They called their model, jobs-to-be-done.

One of those jobs is the way the product performs its functions. Functional requirements for a smartphone include its capabilities for phone calls, texting, and internet connectivity. Both the Galaxy S25 and iPhone 17 can functionally perform those three jobs at very high levels; probably indistinguishably for most of us. But there's more to selecting a smartphone than its function. Christensen et al proposed that beyond functional jobs, we also hire many products based on their performance of social and emotional jobs.

What is the social job of a smartphone? We carry our smartphones in public and today it is easy for other people to determine what kind of phone we use. Galaxy S25s and iPhone 17s are clearly identifiable. That means the one I choose is a social signal to anyone who sees me: "I am an Android person!" What it means to be "an Android person" has social implications: "I am a person who (fill in the blanks)"; "I am not a person who (fill in the blanks)". I am making a statement about much more than simply technological functionality when I choose to affiliate with one or the other of these brands.

That means that being "an Android person" has some connection with my personal identity; that it feels like something to carry one; that the brands perform different emotional jobs.

Take Ford vs. Chevy. The emotional jobs being done by those brands is clear in these bumper stickers that were popular in the 70s and 80s:



When we look at branded objects through the jobs-to-be-done lens we see that the choices we make in hotly competitive product categories are practically always the results of us (unconsciously) matching our evaluation of their capabilities in the functional, social, and emotional with our own personal identity.

For me, in some categories, functional dominates. I don't really care what brand of socks I wear as long as they're comfortable and easy to get on and off. But, for other people, socks become an important social signal ("look at how unique and colorful my socks are!") and have emotional significance ("I feel cool when I wear these socks").

Again, most of this "evaluation" takes place unconsciously. But, a brief conversation is usually all it takes to elicit the importance of the determining factors in brand choices. For example, just ask, "how come you don't use an iPhone?" and you're likely to hear a person's assessment of how well the two brands perform on each of the smartphone's three key jobs-to-be-done. For smartphones, social and emotional jobs are critical choice elements.

This underlying choice architecture helps us understand the ways some objects become disproportionately important to us. “I’d rather eat worms than drive a Chevy?” That tells us these are more than just vehicles for some of us! And, it reveals to us which of the objects we own are most important for expressing our own personal identity.

This is what makes brands so powerful today. Branded objects are clear extensions of ourselves into the world, helping us to successfully fulfill our functional, social, and emotional jobs, and, in doing so, satisfying our underlying needs for belonging, esteem and self-actualization.

That’s why “I’m an Android person” is an important statement in today’s cultural environment. And it’s also why the different decisions we make can help us answer the question: “Why so emotional?”



Letter from the Chairman's Desk

By Sunil Bhatia PhD

I was on an academic visit to China when a professor and his family invited me to dinner at a restaurant that also served vegetarian meals. During the dinner, I noticed his nine-year-old son happily relishing a boiled lobster that had been served on his plate. The sight of the white glandular juices oozing from the lobster made me feel nauseous. The parents, however, took great pride in serving what they considered a delicacy to their child. As a committed vegetarian, I felt extremely uncomfortable and even regretted accepting their invitation.

Later, back in my hotel room, I reflected on the experience. I realized that it was not the child's fault. The human tongue contains millions of taste buds, but only some of them are activated by the foods we are introduced to during childhood. Parents naturally serve the food they believe is healthy and beneficial for their children's growth, and dietary habits are deeply rooted in culture. Who was I to judge their choice of food?

My own emotions had simply not been conditioned to appreciate what the child was enjoying, just as his emotions had been shaped by his upbringing. It was also possible that they silently wondered why I had declined such an expensive delicacy and chosen only vegetarian dishes. The discomfort I experienced was therefore not merely about food; it was a clash of emotions created by different cultural

conditioning and different patterns of taste developed over time. The same meal evoked entirely different emotional responses in each of us.

Primitive humans hunted animals and celebrated their success because killing prey meant survival. Their primary concern was obtaining food by whatever means possible. I often wonder who first guided our ancestors to hunt animals for food. It remains a mystery to me. Even today, modern society continues to consume fish, lobster, goat, and other meats, despite the advances we have made in understanding nutrition and disease. This practice has continued from an era when humans had not yet mastered the management of fire.

An individual could hunt only small animals, whereas larger prey required collective effort. This necessity gradually transformed human emotions and social behaviour, laying the foundation for communities and organized societies. In many ways, humans are also influenced by the billions of bacteria living in their intestines. These microorganisms influence our cravings and food preferences. In a sense, we do not merely eat for ourselves; we also nourish the microbial life within us. Likewise, animals may also be driven by biological mechanisms that guide them towards particular prey.

The discovery and management of fire marked a major turning point in human evolution. It enabled people to move from consuming raw food to roasting and cooking it. Later, the development of agriculture brought an even greater transformation. Instead of killing for survival, humans learned to cultivate crops. This represented a new level of sensitivity and civilization. The invention of cooking utensils and dining practices further refined human behaviour. Today, proper

cleaning, preparation, and processing of food are regarded as essential aspects of hygiene and civilized living.

Advertising agencies also understand how emotions are formed. They often use children to promote specific brands because impressions created during childhood can remain deeply embedded in the mind. When that child later becomes a financially independent adult, he or she is more likely to prefer the same brand. Early emotional associations frequently influence purchasing decisions throughout life.

Plants grow through photosynthesis, drawing energy from sunlight and water. The process of photosynthesis determines not only their growth but also their structure and form.

One day, I noticed a metal nut from a vehicle lying on the road. No one claimed ownership of it. A street sweeper eventually swept it into a pile of roadside garbage. At that moment, the nut had no emotional value because it no longer belonged to anyone. It had become just another discarded object.

However, I imagined the garbage being collected and transported for recycling. A scrap dealer would separate the metal from the rest of the waste and sell it to an industry that recycles scrap into new products. The same metal nut, once considered useless, would be melted, reshaped, and transformed into another useful product. As soon as it became part of a new object, it would once again acquire an owner, and with ownership would come emotions. The new owner would value it, care for it, and ensure that it was not lost. Thus, usefulness generates one kind of emotion, while uselessness creates another. Recycling restores not only the utility of an object but also the emotions associated with ownership and value.

A gambler develops powerful emotions for a particular game until it becomes an addiction. In such a mental state, emotions dominate rational thinking, compelling the individual to take repeated risks in the hope that success will come "this time."

Why do some people commit suicide when they believe they have no chance of winning the love of the person they desire? Why do such intense emotions develop for another individual that a person is willing to sacrifice his or her own existence? The tragic love story of Romeo and Juliet is a classic example of such overwhelming emotions. In my opinion, these behaviours are largely influenced by our hormones. Human emotions are profoundly regulated by hormonal activity. Hatred and anger represent emotional extremes that require tremendous physical and mental energy to sustain. Love, on the other hand, is a more natural emotional state that does not require such continuous expenditure of energy. It is therefore easier to remain in a state of love than in a prolonged state of hatred or anger.

Followers of every religion develop emotional attachments to the objects and products associated with their faith and way of life. A Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim, or a Buddhist may each adopt different lifestyles, and consequently, they are emotionally drawn towards products that support those lifestyles. People often purchase what aligns with their beliefs, traditions, and the practices accepted within their communities.

A shirt once gifted to me remained one of my most treasured possessions throughout my life. I always feared losing it because, to me, it represented much more than a piece of clothing. Emotional attachment had transformed it into something priceless. Associations create emotions, and emotions eventually become memories.

Perhaps this also explains death. When someone close to us dies, what remains are the countless memories created through shared experiences. The physical presence disappears, but the emotional connection survives. It is this absence that causes pain because the person is no longer there to respond to the emotions we continue to carry.

On one occasion, I tore up a photograph, yet I could never treat those pieces of paper as ordinary scrap. My emotional attachment prevented me from doing so. Strong emotional bonds make an object unique and precious in ways that others may never understand. Only those who have experienced similar emotions can truly appreciate its significance.

During my service as a senior officer, I often visited cremation grounds whenever we received news that a colleague had passed away. Although I expressed sympathy, I never experienced deep personal grief over the death of an employee. However, when my own father passed away, my entire emotional world changed. Only then did I truly understand the profound pain of losing someone you deeply love.

I feel highly honoured that Dan Formosa, Ph.D. *Principal at ThinkActHuman, a design consultancy focused on inclusive design and human behavior* has accepted our invitation to serve as the Guest Editor for the July 2026 issue (Vol. 21, No. 7). I am delighted that the theme of this special issue is "Emotions and Products." I am confident that our readers will enjoy exploring this fascinating subject through the diverse perspectives presented by the contributors.

Enjoy reading.

With Regards,

Dr. Sunil Bhatia

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Forthcoming Issues

August 2026 Vol-21 No-8



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Course Leader of the BA design course at the London School of Design and Marketing LSDM.

He is a member of the Board of EIDD Design for All.

He is president of the Portuguese Association of Designers.

He is the Ambassador of "Fibernamics Green", University of Minho.

September 2026 Vol-21 No-9



Dr Arthi Manohar is a Senior Lecturer, Programme Director for BSc Product Design, and EDI Champion at Brunel Design School, Brunel University London. An interdisciplinary design-technology researcher with over twelve years of experience, her interests revolve around exploring design as an inquiry in complex situations. Specifically, her research focuses on applying creative and unconventional methods to investigate the interplay between social design and technology to enhance community creativity, responsiveness, and reflection. Her work spans participatory design, co-design, human-computer interaction, and inclusive design.

She holds a PhD in Digital Product Design from the University of Dundee, where her doctoral research formed part of the EPSRC-funded Digital Economy project TOTeM, and she has been awarded multiple research grants from EPSRC, AHRC, and MRC, with projects spanning trust in IoT, AI accessibility, assistive technology for wheelchair users, and privacy in FemTech applications.

October 2026 Vo-21 No-10



Dr Cathy Dalton is an architect and researcher with a career-long involvement in Universal and

Inclusive Design, advocating for inclusion through her design and research. Her current work is in the area of Design for Neurodiversity/Sensory Design as a critical aspect of Universal Design, and in particular its intersection with existing practice and standards. She co-founded Dalton & O'Donnell Architects, whose clients included the National Disability Authority and Health Services Executive (Ireland), and served as Treasurer to the Institute of Design and Disability (Ireland) the forerunner of EIDD/Design for All Europe. After Dalton & O'Donnell, she was awarded the first PhD in Architecture by UCC in 2014, and held an EU MSCA post-doctoral research fellowship in Assistive Technologies from 2015-18, investigating "tunable" sensory environments and cognitively restorative environments for people with Autism Spectrum Conditions and ADHD. She has contributed to inclusive housing policy in Ireland, most recently in relation to housing adaptation grants, and also in promoting systematic adaptation and re-use of older housing stock as an initiative to address the housing crisis. She has published numerous papers and articles on her work, and has reviewed and edited academic papers for conferences and journals. Dr Dalton is currently a part-time lecturer at Cork Centre for Architectural Education, (CCAEE) jointly operated by UCC and MTU, where she researched for her PhD, and where she has lectured and mentored, most recently on Design for Neurodiversity. She has lectured at Ulster University in Creative Technologies and Design, and guest-lectured and contributed to PhD mentoring/teaching at Slovakian Technical University Faculty of Architecture Design and University of Wales Trinity St David. Dr Dalton has recently been appointed as Director of NAN (Neurodiversity Architecture Network), the London based CIC.

New Books



Sunil Bhatia

Design for All. Volume-II

Drivers of Design



<https://www.morebooks.shop/shop-ui/shop/book-launch-offer/74414a1df61c3d2ea8bf46ae7e3c0cf31769f261>



Sunil Bhatia

Design for All

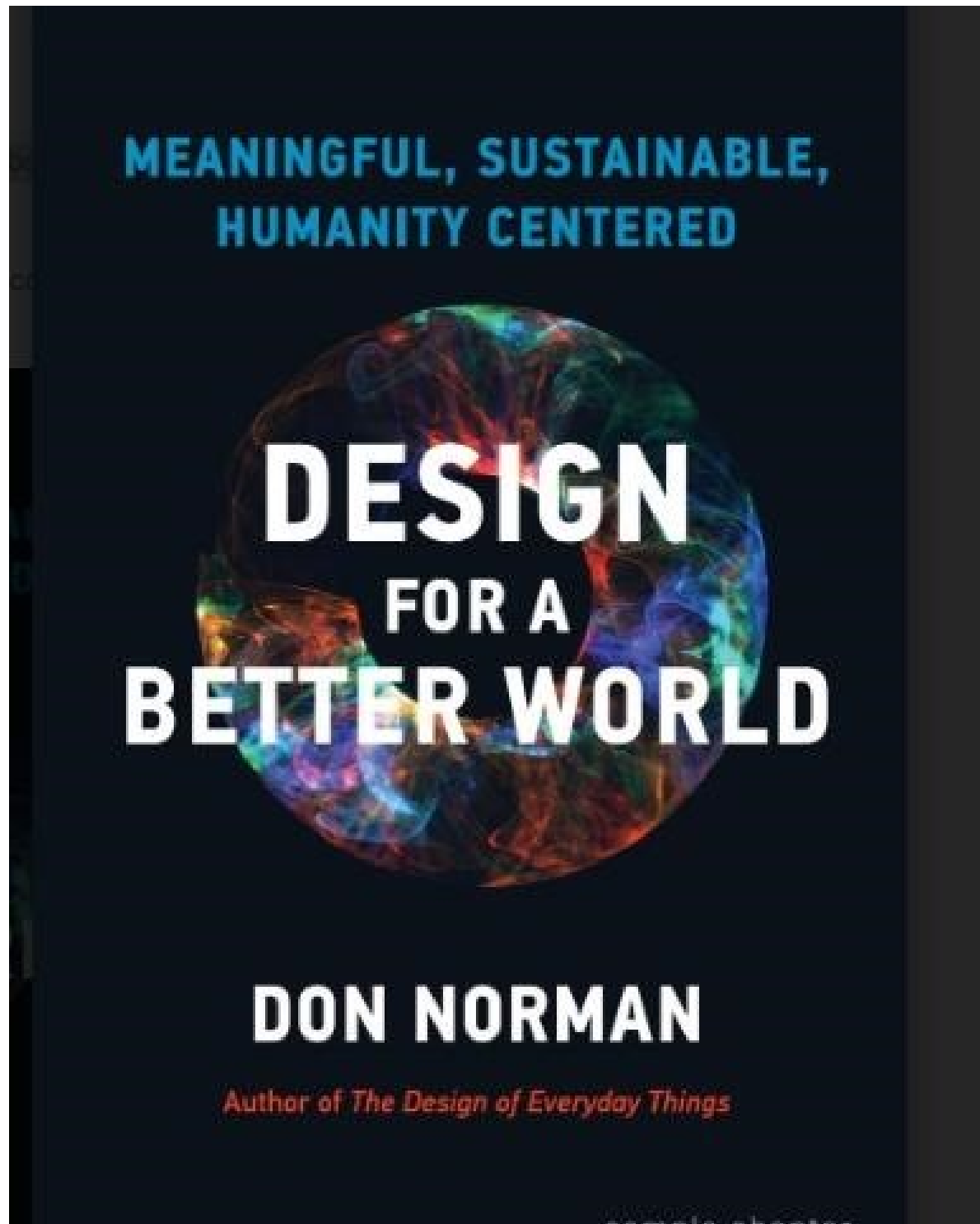
Drivers of Design

Expression of gratitude to unknown, unsung, unacknowledged, unnamed and selfless millions of heroes who have contributed immensely in making our society worth living. Their design of comb, kite, fireworks, glass, mirror even thread concept have revolutionized the thought process of human minds and prepared blueprint of future. Modern people may take for granted but its beyond imagination the hardships and how these innovative ideas could strike their minds. Discovery of fire was possible because of its presence in nature but management of fire through manmade designs was a significant attempt of thinking beyond survival and no

doubt this contributed in establishing our supremacy over other living beings. Somewhere in journey of progress we lost the legacy of ancestors in shaping minds of future generations and completely ignored their philosophy and established a society that was beyond their imagination. I picked up such drivers that have contributed in our progress and continue guiding but we failed to recognize its role and functions. Even tears, confusion in designing products was marvelous attempt and design of ladder and many more helped in sustainable, inclusive growth.

www.lap-publishing.com

it is available on www.morebooks.de one of the largest online bookstores. Here's the link to it: <https://www.morebooks.de/store/gb/book/design-for-all/isbn/978-613-9-83306-1>





News

1. Designing Expressway Color Identification Guidebook Apply Color Design to the Flow Line in Factory

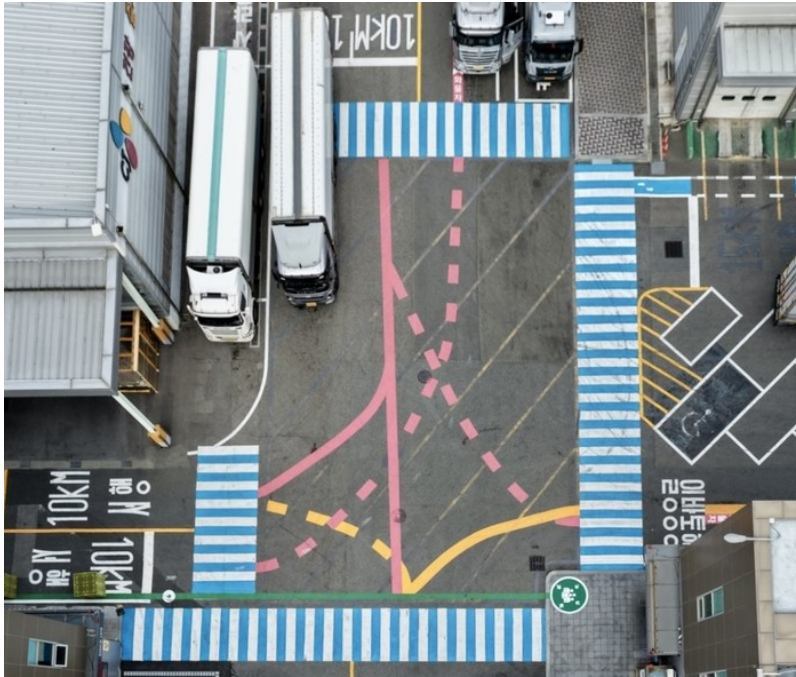


사진 확대

CJ CheilJedang's Busan plant has been applied with "Color Universal Design." CJ Cheil Jedang

CJ CheilJedang announced on the 20th that it has applied "Color Universal Design (CUD)" to its Busan plant for the first time in the Korean food industry to strengthen workplace safety.

Color Universal Design is an advanced color design technique that helps anyone, including the elderly, the color impaired, and those with low vision, to intuitively recognize the location of space and objects at a glance.

CJ CheilJedang's Busan plant introduced safety color designs on major routes such as central intersections, walking guidance lines, crosswalks, and emergency evacuation routes in the factory, based on color-coded guidance lines on expressways. It increased visibility by utilizing differences in coloration, brightness, and saturation, and minimized confusion on the site by clearly distinguishing the movement of freight vehicles, forklifts, and workers.

In particular, it is evaluated that the safety of pedestrians has been dramatically improved by applying this design to safety signs on the floor and wall, as well as to movement guidance lines that anyone can intuitively grasp the movement. CJ CheilJedang plans to gradually expand and apply safety color designs to other workplaces, starting with the pilot case of the Busan plant.

Thanks to these preemptive efforts for on-site safety, the Busan plant obtained the highest grade of "P grade" in the Process Safety Management (PSM) evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Employment and Labor this month. As a result of being recognized for systematic safety management capabilities and excellent process safety levels, it is analyzed that the recently introduced artificial intelligence (AI) risk detection system and advanced safety technologies such as smart safety helmets have created synergy.

In addition, the Busan plant is focusing on spreading safety culture throughout the community. Since 2024, as part of participation in the Busan Regional Employment and Labor Administration campaign, the

industrial safety slogan has been applied to the representative product of the Busan plant, "Hotban," spreading the importance of safety to consumers. In addition, the Ministry of Employment and Labor and the Korea Safety and Health Agency participated in the win-win cooperation project for safety and health, sharing safety management know-how with suppliers and local SMEs and supporting the establishment of the system.

Jang Ki-tae, head of CJ Cheil Jedang's Busan plant, said, "The pilot application of the safety color design at the Busan plant is a meaningful starting point for creating a working environment where anyone can work with confidence," adding, "We will continue to strengthen the on-site safety culture by making safety an irreconcilable top priority."

(Courtesy: MAEIL BUSSINESS)

2. Designing for Everyone: A Blueprint for Inclusive Events

Small, intentional choices are what make an event feel welcoming to everyone—and those choices can vary widely depending on where you are in the world.

Inclusive events have come a long way over the past decade. The introduction of the [UN Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) in 2015 accelerated a paradigm shift that was already underway, moving diversity, equity, and inclusion from “nice to have” to an essential part of event design.

Today, inclusion plays a critical role in determining whether an event feels welcoming, relevant, and accessible. For international events—

where each attendee arrives with different cultural norms, languages, access needs, and levels of comfort with self-advocacy—this becomes even more important.

The good news is that creating a more inclusive event doesn't require a big budget or complicated planning. Often, small changes can have a noticeable impact.

Across the meetings industry, destinations are finding practical ways to embed inclusion into the attendee experience. Examples can be found within the [BestCities Global Alliance](#), a network of 14 meetings destinations across North America, Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Oceania. While each member city is distinct, they share a common belief: Inclusion must be designed, not assumed.



Global Goals, Local Realities

One of the biggest challenges for international event organizers is that inclusion doesn't mean the same thing everywhere.

In one destination, inclusion might start with Indigenous recognition and engagement. In another, it could involve religious observances, language confidence, or cultural expectations around participation. A global inclusion strategy can't just be copied and pasted from one city to the next.

In Melbourne and Vancouver, for example, inclusive event design can involve acknowledging that events take place on First Nations land. Engagement with Indigenous communities, Welcome to Country protocols, and land acknowledgments contribute to events that respect local history, culture, and community.

In Singapore, inclusion can begin well before registration opens. Scheduling a conference during a major religious or cultural observance can unintentionally limit participation. In this context, thoughtful calendar planning becomes an inclusion strategy.

Meanwhile, in Berlin, inclusion is often considered throughout the event lifecycle, including venue selection, mobility planning, supplier choices, and program design.

These examples provide an important reality check: While the goal of inclusion might be universal, the way it shows up in practice is often very much local.



Beyond Compliance

Another common misconception is that compliance automatically equals inclusion. But this isn't always the case.

For example, in the United States, compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is essential, but it doesn't guarantee an inclusive experience. A venue can meet legal requirements while still overlooking factors such as neurodiversity, economic accessibility, or psychological safety.

Another example is Tokyo, which is recognized for its extensive accessible infrastructure, including tactile paving and elevators at most transit systems. Yet these features only benefit attendees if organizers actively plan how delegates will navigate the city, move between venues, and access event experiences.

Similarly, cities such as Copenhagen are known for their strong social welfare systems and accessibility standards. However, inclusive events require planners to identify these elements and make intentional choices around communication, participation, and networking.



Inclusion at Every Touch Point

Representation matters, but it's only one piece of the puzzle.

A diverse speaker lineup can't compensate for a networking reception designed only for extroverts or a venue that overwhelms attendees with noise, lighting, or confusing wayfinding.

Inclusive design considers the entire attendee journey.

At registration, that may mean asking for pronouns, accessibility requirements, and dietary needs as standard practice while clearly explaining how the information will be used. It can also include accessible websites, plain-language communications, multilingual information where appropriate, and detailed pre-event guidance.

Within programming, inclusion means offering a variety of keynotes, workshops, facilitated discussions, and hybrid participation options that invite attendees to engage in multiple ways. Captioning, sign language interpretation, readable slide design, and different ways to ask questions can also make participation more accessible.

Social events deserve the same level of thought. Not everyone networks in the same way. Inclusive events offer choices: alcohol-free options, quieter gathering spaces, cultural experiences, and catering that reflects a range of preferences.

Partnering for More Inclusive Events

One of the clearest lessons from the business events industry is that convention bureaus and local partners should be involved early in the planning process. They can help translate broad inclusion goals into practical, locally relevant actions and identify opportunities organizers might not have considered.

Ultimately, inclusive design strengthens attendance, engagement, and reputation. When delegates feel seen and supported, they are more likely to participate fully, recommend the event to others, and return in the future.

If we want events to bring people together in meaningful ways, we need to stop expecting attendees to adapt to the experience and instead design experiences that work for a broader range of people.

(Courtesy UN)



Programme and Events



Spark Student Design Awards: Any current University-level (or above) student, in any design category. (All entries in this competition must be student work, not professional work. Entries may be submitted from any time period of the student's study—could be a piece from last year).



Best of KBIS Awards Now Open for 2026 Entries



Best of KBIS Awards Now Open for 2026 Entries.jpg

The Kitchen and Bath Industry Show (KBIS) has opened applications for the premier awards program, Best of KBIS, that will spotlight industry excellence in 2026.

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RC21 VIENNA 2026

INEQUALITIES AND THE CITY

 CALL FOR ABSTRACTS:



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Cumulus 2026
Dunedin
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