Practicing Ecodesign

Okala Practitioner   Conclusion

Practicing Ecodesign

This concluding presentation outlines the ethical challenges and professional issues that designers may face when trying to improve the ecological and social performance of products and other systems they design.

It also offers ~~explores~~ tips for how ecodesign can be pursued in the design disciplines and in related fields.

Now is the time

The design disciplines play a uniquely influential role in the unprecedented ecological crisis.

Designers can educate our companies, clients and the design profession about the vast opportunities for ecodesign.
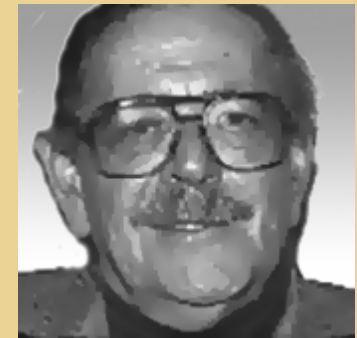
Dilemmas of environmental pioneers

North American environmental pioneers experienced ethical dilemmas where they demonstrated integrity:

Rachel Carson was bitterly attacked by the petrochemical industry that produced the pesticides that she denounced. Although many persistent, bioaccumulative chemicals were banned thanks to her work, the global production of toxic synthetic chemicals has increased some fifty-fold since 1960.

"Bucky" Fuller advocated the free distribution of ideas and design concepts, stating that "ideas can not be owned."

For criticizing the US automobile industry, Victor Papanek was expelled from his professional peer association (IDSA), and readmitted over a decade later.

Communication is Key

For product managers and others to understand ecological and sustainable design, they need opportunities to discuss and think about it.

Designers are well placed in the product development process to begin these discussions about environmental and design issues.

Directions in Ecodesign

The world is changing rapidly.

Along with this, the design disciplines change.

When planning to work in ecodesign, you can consider possibilities that have not yet been imagined; different ways of working, different places to work. You may be creating a new path for yourself and for others.
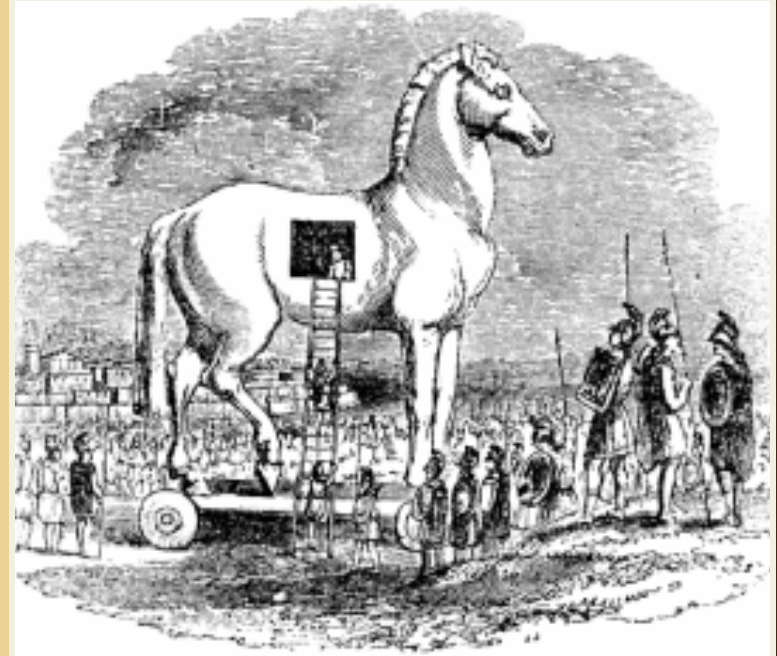
Inside a corporation

Ask for the **mission** statement and environmental policy.

Find a **sympathetic champion** in upper management

Work with marketing to make sure the **right questions** get asked, such as energy use, product/system lifetime, social implications, types of use, etc.

Propose an **assessment** or review of a product or service. This often gets a conversation started.

Consider the Trojan horse approach… reveal your ideas at the right time.

Inside a consultancy

Make sure the research teams ask the **right questions**, such as energy use, product/system lifetime, social implications, disposal, use scenarios, etc.

Use your perceived naiveté to take a few **risks.**

Propose an **assessment** or review of a product or service.

Show examples of products that set the standard for sustainability**.**

Ask questions,
start conversations,
plant seeds

Questions you can ask

In either a company or consultancy, designers can influence a development team to pursue ecodesign, especially during the initial research phases.

- In reviewing the company's history and its current environmental policies, where do the policies support ecological design thinking?

- What competitor products are promoted as environmentally responsible?

- How are those product and systems priced? Are they selling well?

- Would a detailed study of our target customer prompt new ideas?

- Might low-impact innovations improve the opportunity to compete?

- What might be this company's path to ecodesign?
  Discussing this scenario might reveal opportunities.

Ecodesign beyond conventional Practice

1. Because of corporate attention to money above all else, combined with the power and freedom of global finance, private sector design can be difficult. You may decide to find working situations that are more sympathetic to your values.

2. Donate some time: Designers who work on sustainability issues are frequently asked to do low cost or pro bono work because, "it's for a good cause." And so it is; a nonprofit structure allows you to make doing-things-for-a-good-cause your bottom line.

3. Be an active citizen: As both economic actors and citizens, designers can contribute to shaping large decisions in favor of human and ecological values.

Adapted From: *The Designers Atlas of Sustainability*, by Ann Thorpe

Ethics discussion:

1

Despite the risks, what are the benefits of refusing to design a product that you find unacceptably damaging or wasteful?

Ethics discussion:

2

What are the benefits of making small improvements to a product made in high volume versus not doing anything at all?
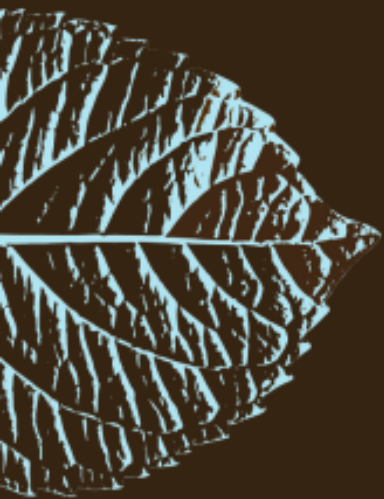
Directions discussion:

3

What are your thoughts about working in organizations (government or not-for-profit) to develop product policy, or designing for people in economically disadvantaged populations?

Directions discussion:

4

What are your thoughts about pursuing interdisciplinary education to further your ability to use your ecodesign skills?

Okala Practitioner
Integrating Ecological Design

This presentation is part of an educational presentation series that supports teaching from the *Okala Practitioner* guide.

Okala Practitioner and these presentations were created by the Okala Team to disseminate fact-based knowledge about ecological design to the design disciplines and business.

Unless provided in the presentations, Information sources are found in the *Okala Practitioner* guide.

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The Okala Team initiated the collaboration with the US EPA and the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) in 2003. The team developed Okala Practitioner with support from Autodesk, IBM, Eastman Chemical and the IDSA Ecodesign Section.

Okala Practitioner is available through amazon.com.

More information and the free Okala Ecodesign Strategy App are found at Okala.net.