

HOW Design Live

Jahan Mantin and Boyuan Gao – *The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions, How to Untangle your Intent from your Impact and Mitigate Harm*

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Speaker Introduction by Amy Conover, HOW Show Director:

Jahan Mantin and Boyuan Gao are the founders and principals of *Project Inkblot*, which is a design for diversity consultancy. They train coach and consult with media and tech teams on how to use their design for diversity framework to create equitable products, services, and content for all. They were on the Leadership track for HOW Design Live in May and Boston, well then COVID happened. So we postponed our event from May from Boston, moved it to Atlanta for October the 26th to the 29th. And you'll still see them on stage on the 27th. We wanted to regroup about ways that we could partner together on a live session prior to October. We had some great content lined up. Then mass protest about systemic racism happened across the country. And so we tweaked the content just a bit because we wanted to bring to the HOW audience, something that was addressing the now. Like, what do people need? Where are folks even at? How do we make sense of all of this? This is what brings us here today. With this digital session, *The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions, How to Untangle your Intent from your Impact and Mitigate Harm*. Please join me in welcoming to the HOW Design Online stage, Jahan Mantin and Boyuan Gao.

Jahan Mantin and Boyuan Session Start:

Boyuan

It's such a pleasure to be here. It's also really weird that we're staring at a room and not a people, but we went, yeah, we totally want to thank HOW Design and we want to thank everybody for tuning in here and being with us today. Thank you. Alright, so we're going to, we're going to get going. Let's get going. Cause we have a lot of content going on. So again, today's session is all about *The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions, How to Untangle your Intent from your Impact and Mitigate Harm*. And as Amy said so beautifully, so eloquently, right? We're in the middle of this time where all these issues are triangulated, we're dealing with the economic crisis. We're dealing with COVID, we're dealing with you know, all this mobilization around anti-racism. And so we're going to touch upon all of those things.

But before we do that, we are going to just share a little bit about ourselves and give context around all of it. So here we are, I'm Boyuan Gao. I am the co-founder and principal of project Inkblot, and a little bit about me personally. I was born in China. I'm a Chinese-American woman. I'm currently based out of Massachusetts. And I lived in New York for about 15 years prior to that before COVID and Jahan and I met as music and culture editors at a magazine. I'm going to pop it on over to her to share a little bit better as well.

Jahan

I'm Jahan Mantin. I'm a native New Yorker. I am currently in Bed-Stuy Brooklyn and my professional background is I was Spanish Hispanic from the publishing industry to marketing and advertising. And as a

black woman in those industries often been on the receiving end of good intentions, gone awry. We have a lot to share in this session that will be super helpful to folks.

Boyuan

Yes, yes. And so let's just level set for a moment. All right. So every single one of us, every person organization business had cultural defaults that impede our ability to create excellent work, to create effective work. Right. So what do we mean by that? All right. Here's some of the ways that that shows up, John, do you want to,

Jahan

Yeah, absolutely. So, you know, we're going to get into and 10 versus impact and all of that, but we want to give some backgrounds right. And started sharing some language that we'll be using for the presentation. And just to give a little background of who we are and why we do what we do, how we were before jumping into the meat of it. So cultural falls is a term that you're, you'll be hearing a lot throughout this presentation and it can result in all of these ways that we see here and that can live out like hiring practices that are elitist and or racist or based in nepotism. Cultural defaults can live out in a very micro level, like within your team, you know, who gets to speak, who speaks the loudest, who's viewed as an expert whose voices are silence, what are the deep balls that are always present that we fall back into? And what I want to say here is that not all cultural defaults are created equal. That's like saying, well, we all have biases. Yeah, we do. And you know, if you, in a position of power and opportunity, cultural defaults often resonate on a mass and systemic scale.

Boyuan

Absolutely. And there are so many different impacts to this as Jahan mentioned, but one of the ones to point to at the bottom is we have changed in many worlds over since COVID, since the situation that we're in now. Right? So the inability to innovate within a rapidly changing landscape is one of the impacts of being inside of an organization that functions off cultural defaults.

Jahan

Okay. So we love this quote, racism and inequity are products of design. They can be redesigned. This is not our quote, but we love it. And just giving credit to Christine Ortiz, who is the founder of *Equity Lead Design*. So another equity and design.org, and we'll be touching on all of these things today, right? And how, if the route is rotten, to be frank, then of course the processes and systems that follow, or also going to be that way. So something is rooted in racism. That is a product of which design on many levels and we'll get into it.

Boyuan

Right? And so therefore equity can also be a broader to design. So that leads us to who we are as an org. So again, as Amy mentioned in the beginning, we are designed for diversity consultancy. So project inkblot meets, right. What we do is we talk about these inequities and the possibility of equity, and we provide tools and frameworks around how to actually design that into your organizations, into the product services and content that you're creating. And that's how we partner with different organizations. And so just to snapshot at our team. So we are designers work futurists, where artists were creatives, right. And so just to bring down a little bit, what do we mean by design? This is the design community, but we also know that there are people in healthcare who are on this call. We know that there are people who work in disparate industries, all tackling these issues at the very moment. So for our team, our North star is how do we create a future for all as futurist, that's always what we're oriented towards. And so what it is that we specifically designed our, we designed strategies, we designed in real life programs, we designed systems and processes within organizations, within teams that allow for the end results to actually meet the demands of the people who are most impacted most in harm's way of these issues today. Jahan, anything else to add to that?

Jahan

Okay. So design for diversity, as I mentioned is a framework. And if there were to eliminate cultural defaults, if there to eliminate racial biases, really looking at how is that being embedded to what we are creating. And we center racial equity. We want to be very clear about that this framework can be applied to any group that we call misrepresented, right. So it certainly can be used for as those ends, but we sent her a racial equity and it just to echo it by Wednesday, because it's important. The entire purpose of this framework is to meaningfully meet the needs and the demands of those who are most impacted most in harm's way to create better outcomes for all.

Boyuan

And this is how we train on how to adopt the deeper D framework into how it is that you work. We coach and develop equitable leaders and future leaders to become equitable leaders. And we also consult on projects to co-design equitable products, services, content experiences, and also work culture.

Jahan

Yeah. And here's just a static shot of some of the things that were very influenced by that inspire us, that have led to a framework that again, centers those most at harm and also creates co-design and brings in participatory design. And if you were in the, you know, this language is familiar to you, we just want to acknowledge that this framework and our work is a result of past work that folks have done been doing for a very long time and in different industries, it's a result of cocreation, it's a result of our personal and professional experiences and our collaborators experience. So we just want to acknowledge that and we love Esaray.

Gao

Also part of equity is also calling on our lineage and getting credit work, but it is due. And so now we're going to shift gears to get into some of the meat of it.

Jahan

Yes. And one thing also to call out we'll be saying design a lot as well. When said, we know there are tons of folks on this call who already have designing, like your title. Like, you're very comfortable with thinking of yourself as a designer, but you know, our philosophy is that everyone is a designer. If you are a human by nature, you are designing. There might be teachers on this call, you're designing curriculum, you know, as healthcare workers, designing processes, and that cause us some agency, and we can start to redesign. So just want to put that out there. So want to start with a personal story? I'm a few years back when myself other co-creators executive producers, we produced a video interview series called *Fit The Description*. This was created as a passion project. It was in response to the murders of Alton Sterling, Philando Castillo based on you know, police violence, which is what we're seeing again today.

It's a very, very old stories that have been happening for centuries anyways. So we decided that we wanted to start to look at well, what do black male police officers think about this? We don't hear them. We don't hear their voice who are quote unquote, the good cops who are doing work around this. And so we came up with this series and this series was interviewing black male police officers and black male civilians, having these conversations around their personal experiences with, and within law enforcement. So we have this screening, restoring had this whole Northeast tour. There was a workshop that we had co-created that went along with it. Things are going fine. We think things are going well. And the civilians that we curated came from a variety of different backgrounds. That's important to say there were teachers, healers, et cetera. Well, into our tour, this older black gentleman comes up to us at one of our screenings and says, you know, you don't have anyone that's formerly incarcerated.

And that was a total blind spot for us. And what I want to say about that is that we had had about 30 people on our team, all where people are color-separate too and over half were black men. And not one of us saw that we were excluding a community, one of the communities most at harm, right within this quote unquote group called black men. And that had a huge impact on us. And to be quite honest, we were not using our own framework on ourselves and how we've been using our framework. We would have been able to see that. And actually course-correct. So I say that because it's not just about like doing the right thing or the moral thing to do, actually the outcome in this case of film series would have been more robust, more nuanced would have been infinitely better. Had we centered the voices most impacted. So here's an example, right? Of good intentions and negative impact or unintended consequences, or example of causing harm and where people that think about this constantly. And yet, if we're not paying close attention, we can also start to resort to our own defaults.

Right? Exactly. And a couple of other things to add. So, as Jahan said, the majority of people on this project were people of color, majority of black men. And, you know, to look back at that, most of us came from the same economic socioeconomic background. Most of us were college educated. I mean, there are a lot of things, again, as you mentioned around defaults that we weren't even, we didn't even eliminate for ourselves. Right. So we're going to actually move back to this several times as a case study for the rest of this presentation. Here we go. So what the heck is it cultural depo? We've said it like 50 times, right? So here is our definition that dominant culture lens or points of view POV as the default for what informs how and what you design resulting in exclusion of all other cultural BOVs.

Bao

So you see this little “T” here, we just want to point that out, because that is a tool. This question is a tool. This question, you can just bring back to your desk or wherever as you're working on, whatever it is that you're working on currently. Right? So we encourage you to take a screenshot, but this down, but this is just a good centering question. Before you jumped into a strategy for something, another key definition that we want to pop up here, we've been talking about equity. So one thing to say is diversity for us, just we're going to do this really quickly. Diversity is the composition of something it's who's in the room, right? Inclusion is how are misrepresented people being regarded as decision makers and leaders? What is the experience of that? So that's a whole lot. You can come to our website for those definitions we're in down even further, but what is equity? This is really the key here. So it's the systems and processes that minimize and repair harm to misrepresented communities, as well as ensure that the outcomes of do not preference or discriminate. And so you can look at this in terms of your day to day workflows, right? Your decision making, who's making decisions and, and also how, and what you design and for whom, right. So somebody wanted to take a screenshot. So I'm just going to go back for one second.

Jahan

You know, thinking about everything that's happening right now, this is really what's at play. Diversity inclusion are nice. That's cute. But really what we're talking about is equity. And again, if we're thinking about root cause like how are we actually addressing the root and then building systems and processes that addressed right. Root cause.

Boyuan

Absolutely. All right. So you can just take a moment here to fill in the blank, right? So this is just for yourself. If you have a notebook, or if you have a piece of paper in front of you, this is something that you can just do right now. We're not going to take a whole lot of time, but what are your cultural defaults? And you can think about this in, at the level of family, maybe your organization, perhaps the business that you started, or even beyond that, Jahan.

Jahan

Yeah. No, I think that's great. And the thing is that the default is really, it's, what's always there, you know, you're working in advertising and you're casting. What's always there. We know that historically whiteness has always been the default. Right. And then that excludes everyone else.

Boyuan

All right. So let's talk about barriers, actually, Jahan, you had something really great to set up barriers, but one thing to say is like, barriers are, what is preventing us from going about this a different way.

Joahn

Right. And it really looks like you know, what, why is it? Everyone's like, why aren't we thinking about these things? And we're not trained to, we're not trained to think about these things. There are barriers, barriers show up in very, very real ways. But when I'm going to have you, right. So right. Jimmy and strategy, there's a fair projection, right? This is actually how it shows up in your work. This is how it shows up on your team as a barrier to actually doing the work of designing for diversity of looking critically at, you know, when we print, are we excluding, you know, for us, again, telling ourselves when we talked about it, the description for us, the barrier was believing that we are the expert. I know personally, I was like, well, this is my community. I don't even, I'm not even thinking about using our own framework because I already know.

And we didn't know there was actually a lot more for us to know. Right. So that got in the way of actually creating the type of content that would have been most effective. Absolutely. And also just want to add jumping into strategy. This is something that we've see, it's just rampant. It's most businesses are oriented this way. Like, let's just do it. Let's come up with a strategy. Let's come up with a response to what's happening right now and let's pop it up. Right. So doing that without critically thinking about some of the tools that we're going to present and just a little bit can cause harm.

And those are all the symptoms of, you know, dominant culture of white dominant culture. That's what we've inherited. So this is actually becomes the way that we work and it's like, move fast, move fast. You're going without being intentional, kind of stopping, you know, creating real partnerships. So five phases of design for diversity with just going to focus high level on intent versus impact for today. But we just want to walk you through what this looks like. So the five faces really dies and critically to like these critical core questions. First question is around interdependent teams. So we know in the design community, you know, how might we is like a really popular problem solving question to frame the problem that's being solved? How might we solve XYZ? But how might we doesn't look at well, who are we who's on this team and where do you come from and how does your racial identity of your cultural identity impact and influence what it is that you're creating?

You know, how do we get to know that on like a deeper level, right? How is, how are we being influenced in that way, by how we're designing? The second thing we look at is equity ideation that really focuses on, okay, what are we targeting? Like what are we creating and who might we be excluding? And the other thing about equity ideation, I mentioned root cause earlier is that we really want to start to address the root cause when we're creating solutions, we might not be able to solve it in that one solution, but we can start to address it. Right. And then in 10 worst impact, which again, we're focusing on today is like, what could go wrong? What could go horribly awry and also on a home on which communities and then source community has us looking at well, how are we going to engage decision makers within the source community, which we refer to as the experts, right? The people we're trying to reach. And then ethical partnerships is the whole heart of the framework. How are we then creating mutually beneficial generative, sustainable, you know, trust based relationships with folks from other communities

Boyuan

And bam, here we are today, right? So we're talking about intent versus impact. And again, just want to reiterate, there's a lot to this. This has been very deep framework. There are many, many tools we're just going to be very high level about them. So intent versus impact again is the third phase. And just to pop this up here, because that's why we're here. The roads of hell. I mean, let's just all say it together

was paved, is paved with good intentions. So let's break this down a little bit. Intent is personal to you. Let me say that again, intent is personal to you. One more time. Intent is personal to you and lastly intent, it's still personal to you. So, so what the heck is in half then impact is how it lives in the world with actual human beings. And just to reiterate this one more time, intent is not impact. Many people think that their intention is the impact that they're putting out there. And let's just take a look yet. Some of the thinking here, right? So we know these beautiful faces, most of you all know. So really the thinking is, okay, I'm going to go out there. I'm going to create the best X in the world. Right. So let's talk about what that is. It's a mindset. So what else can we say about the mindset?

Jahan

Yeah. It looks like, you know, move fast and break things you know, scale and as quickly as possible, you know, the optimized and efficiency and there's nothing wrong with being efficient and being productive. Like course we want those things, right. But it's the, at all cost, it's like doing that at all costs that creates a type of mindset as a type of way of working. And it's one that then we start to bring into our own work culture. Right. And it doesn't take into consideration, wait a minute, how might I be causing harm and on who.

Boyuan

Exactly. And this also trickles down, we're a woman of color owned business. And there are times that we fall into this mindset. Many times we fall into this mindset, right. So it's also just, again, reiterating the point that there is a dominant culture at play that we've all inherited. And so if you're just some other examples, just because this was in our talk title. So we had to put the big pins for her, because what in the hell who came up with that? That's a ridiculous idea, but also hysterical. And actually if you go to Amazon, it's still, I think it's still up there. They're just like the funniest comments of all the time under there. So highly recommend. And then yeah, Tom, that's great. So many of us are from the moms for one model and great intention, right. A social enterprise. What's the word? It's a one for one. So no, I was going to say a social impact organization. Right. And we like to, we joke around and say, it should be called social intent or social intention as a field because there's so many things that go rise. So what happened here was that two things actually, Jahan, do you want to share?

Jahan

Yeah. So two things, right. In terms of great intention, it sounds great. It sounds amazing. Like what could go wrong? Right. And then part of the outcome, there was then folks in mostly like their foot communities, Ashley, when you start wearing shoes can actually cause physiological damage to your feet. So that was a harm that was created. And then the other thing was it really disturbed the local cobbler Academy right there, the local cobblers in these communities that all of a sudden lost their businesses. Right. So again, just some examples of good intentions that then result in outcome better, not desirable.

Boyuan

And here's a pretty big one right now.

Jahan

Yeah. So, you know, this is actually really fascinating, right? There are tons of PPE that don't fit women because they're not the right size. And actually there's a UK based organization called *National Health Services* that reported on this 77%, over three quarters is health. Healthcare workers are women. And even the smallest size did not fit them. They were too big and even mass that were built as a unisex. Right. And I quote, were designed off of the designed to fit the face and body shape of quote default European male. So we can see that the potential for good intentions to cause real harm is, is there?

Boyuan

Yeah, that's clear as day. So let's go through another one. So our buddy here, Mark Zuckerberg started social, you know, started Facebook as a humble idea to connect folks online and create connection between folks digitally. Right? So let's look at now, let's take a glimpse at some of these headlines. In the past years, house Democrats released 3,500 rush to link to Facebook ads, a genocide incited on Facebook with post for Myamars military, Facebook employee stage virtual walkout to protest Trump posts, which was just last week, actually. Right. And then, you know, his face has completely changed from that time to now. So just pointing this out and another impact here around Facebook is that there've been resignations from employees who are personally impacted by policing personally impacted by COVID personally impacted in all these different ways. Specifically be POC you know, black indigenous people of color inside of this company who are having personal impacts due to some of these things on these headlines. So putting that out there,

Jahan

And then another example, we, we love sharing this in presentations, hands and trainings, et cetera, would be really cashers. Again, this didn't look like what is the default? Some of y'all might already know this, but if you don't, you know, Kodak color film really decades actually built for white folks because the Shirley card is arrow point. So Shirley was the woman, white woman model volt, right to test the whole film. And they were after was always a white woman. So Ashley White skin became the default. And that really means that the film actual the chemicals on the film didn't capture darker skin or black folks. And the reason that codex started to shift, right, how they were creating film was because wood furniture, makers and chocolate makers started to complain because the film wasn't capturing the nuances in their product. So a really clear example of the default here and the impact. And then even more insidious, we had examples like self driving vehicles that actually don't recognize dark skin. They don't recognize black folks that can actually like kill people. Right. And part of that is the design of user research of the technology and how that's impacted,

Boyuan

Right? Like the data sets and all of that kind of stuff. So another thing to just point here is that we use the Kodak example to say, this happened however many decades ago, but the continuation of that thinking and that doing and exactly those same biases are still embedded today. Right? And here's another example that relates to policing because this is obviously a hot topic right now. So AI police surveillance streets, you know, how AI police surveillance treats people of color let's look at this advanced surveillance technology is being deployed despite the laws that risk perpetuating racial biases in the criminal justice system. And so one thing that, you know, the flawed thinking is that technology is

objective it's neutral, right? And so the idea here is let's introduce AI to actually eliminate bias. And if we do that, we'll be able to target who the real criminals off the problem is because of this continuation from Kodak. And even before that, into the thinking, now it's the datasets and all of that stuff inside of this technology is perpetuating and actually celebrating that racial bias. And there's another, just very recent and relatable example. Cause you're all probably getting flooded with these announcements and messages in your inboxes from brands saying, we need to do better. So let's break that down a little bit,

Jahan

Yeah. So what we see and a lot of these public apologies is that it tends to be external phase. And what we know is that the intention could be good, right. But what's the potential unintended harm or what are negative potential negative impacts. If we're not taking action to follow through, like what might be the negative impacts on black employees, et cetera. So again, really getting really clear on like, why are we saying this? Where are we saying this to what, how do we plan to follow up with this? And again, how are black employees going to be better off as a result?

Boyuan

Yeah. And a couple of things to just add to that is that just personally speaking, when I read a lot of these announcements or these commitment statements and things like that, when it says we stand with B black community, it indicates pretty clearly that there's nobody in the leadership making that announcement or writing that memo who is black. So there's already a distancing happening there. And another thing to point out is there's a lack of vulnerability around, like, what is the personal impact of having been in an organization that perpetuated racial bias or, you know, white dominate culture and what were those impacts specifically and personally on the internal staff. So those are big missings for us. So just, you know, from a personal standpoint, reading these, I'm like, I don't know if I believe it, right. So we're going to dive into again, looking at a T here, this is a tool, something that you can screen shot. So a core question here and John mentioned it earlier is what is the worst case scenario and on whom? So again, with intent versus impact is the third phase of design for diversity. This is the core question. And then there are many other tools that we use with this, but this is a good starter. And one thing that we always say is that this is not about telling the future because we can't do that. I'm not clairvoyant. I don't know about you, Jahan, are you?

Jahan

No, no, maybe a little bit, but not really. No. Right. And that's the thing, right? It's like we can start to retrain ourselves to think differently about how we're creating. And so the way we would set this up, but you're using this as a tool. This is a brainstorming tool it's meant to be done in a team it's high level, as we when said, it's like the first step, right. And you want to juxtapose that to your intention. You know, our intent, the intention is always great, nothing wrong with a good intention, right. But you're putting that for the, Hey, what are intentions here? What is the, what's the best that could happen? And then you just put in you juxtapose that to, well, what's the worst case scenario and on whom what could possibly go wrong. And if you start to look, you will see, there are things that feel really like far out there, like really speculative or really far it, but you'll also see that there are things that you can do. You can take to what's immediate right now.

Boyuan

Yeah. We love saying low hanging fruit makes like these four so orphous or so so large, like how do we start tackling them? But they're things that are low cost and even free that we can do now. And the biggest thing is, as Jahan said, training the mind and building the muscle as a practice to start thinking about these questions

Jahan

And then the next questions here are these questions here, all ideation based, right? So we're looking at the, you know, pre right, what could go wrong and then present, you can go with these questions again, right. And then post, and I'll at my, when kind of walked through, going back to fit the description, our experience there. So you can see how we broke it down.

Boyuan

Yeah, for sure. So we specifically put these four layers of impasse because usually we think about impact is out there, but there's actually a personal impact. So if we were to look at fit that description once more, right. So using that as a case study my experience after that older black gentleman came up to us and really opened her eyes to the fact that we had this huge bias there. My personal impact was, I mean, I felt resistant to the feedback initially and actually angered by it. I was agitated by it. And then that shifted into a little bit of shame and embarrassment that we had potentially created something to, to add to this harmful narrative. Right. So that was personal to me. And then within our team, there are many mixed emotions. There was also just like, how could we have done this?

How do we recover from this? There's like a moment of awakening, but also a slap in the face a little bit. Right. And then, so those two are internal that you and your team, that's all internal. And then the external is what was the impact on our organization, our business community society and the world. Right? So looking at our our films, the product wasn't as good as it could have been, right. The narrative was not as robust. It's not you know, it did not encapsulate really what it needed to. And also the harm out in the world is perpetuating again, this narrative that really, again, was not our intention, but we happen to do.

Jahan

I also say that we were able to, you know, kind of course correct using our framework, we had to go back, look at what was missing. How do we engage these communities, et cetera. Right. So as we were saying, there are many ways, many points of entry. When you can start doing this type of thinking, you have to start up a project and an ideation session, pre strategy, strategic communication strategy. Also like at the end of a product, like a team retro, as we just said, all great points. And it's also not like a one and done kind of exercise. I want you to do a one going great. Got it. Move on. Like you can always constantly go back and start looking at, okay, wait a minute. Let's pause for a second. As this campaign, as this product, as this piece of marketing content, et cetera, as it's developing, as it's growing, as things are shifting what could go wrong now, you know, what could be the impact on X community here? So there are tons of opportunities to use this.

Boyuan

Absolutely. And one thing to just interject in here is that this is part of our framework and a framework in itself. We might've already mentioned this to not felt racism. It can not solve bias, but I can address that. And the other thing to say is that everybody would love to have a nice tidy toolbox and a checklist right. Of things to do. And this is not what this is about. It is not prescriptive. It is emergent. These tools are again, part of the practice of designing for diversity, really for equity. All right. So moving forward.

Jahan

So we really love this example and we thought it was super interesting. So probably most of you all know *The Body Shop*, but it was the first large, we tailor to start this process called open hiring. And so they practice this in their warehouse and they had such like a really great success. They brought it into their retail stores. I don't know where this process is with COVID et cetera, but I'll share about it. So the process for hiring, they shifted the process. So we can split it up three questions and the questions were you know, are you authorized to work in the U S can you be on your feet for X amount of hours? Can you lift X amount of pounds? And if you answered yes to those questions, you were hired first come first served. So they totally redesigned their hiring process.

And part of the reason they did that is because they're looking at, you know, communities that are most impacted. So this opens up like huge opportunities for folks who are formerly incarcerated, you know, for us, I think I've been really struggling to find work. And what I want to say about that is, you know, you mentioned earlier that there's something very profound about designing around and centering those who are most impact. One of the really great outcomes from this process was it started as a pilot and is now the way that they hire is that their turnover rate just went way, way, way down, like significantly decreased as a result of redesigning a process around hiring. So it just points to, like, there are many ways to redesign in equitable systems that often can, this it's actually putting a stake in the ground is possible and actually shifting that is possible and taking action as possible.

Boyuan

That's great. So again, here's another visual for you feel free to do a screenshot if you'd like, so our cultural defaults plus our good intentions equals harm, and that's all there is to say about that. So let's move on. And here's another tool since this is not interactive, but this is something that we would like for you to just, again, go back to your desk or whatever project you're working on, and really use this as a reflection. So when was a time when you're a good intentions, plus a cultural depo created harm to others. So think about that. I'm really in this moment of all these national conversations happening right now, it's a good opportunity to just take a look at that. And then just going back, we're going to start wrapping up soon, but so going back to our fit, that description example yeah, we, if we were to look at what was missing, there are a few things that were missing,

Jahan

Yeah. So what was missing, what we said before was not using your own framework, right. What was missing was really looking at again, what is the good intention here? And then who would, you know, where might we be doing harm and on which communities are like, what's the worst case scenario? What was really missing for us was source community, which is another piece of the framework that we're not going to go into now. But we mentioned that going to the source is really like going to the community again, that's most impacted and was missing, was a partnership there. And I'm setting that up and actually against centering that.

Boyuan

Absolutely. And I'm just going to point to the one question that I see right now, that's directly related to this about what could go wrong, actually being tied to phase one, which is like, who are we not just, how might we, is that the thing to say about this framework is that it is cyclical. It is iterative, right? So everything meshes into every other phase of it. So that's a really excellent question. So again, just looking at this again at a glance, there are five phases, this is an iterative framework. It's not linear. So as Joanne just mentioned, right? So that intent versus impact leads us into who is missing, who is missing, who do we need to create those partnerships with and in an equitable fashion, not just who should we bring in, but how can we co-design with this community,

Jahan

Right. And that's, that's very distinct from like tokenizing or just representation alone. That's a distinct thing

Q&A

Q: HOW Design Online Attendees for Digital Session – read by Amy Conover, HOW Show Director

A: Jahan Mantin and Boyuan Gao

Amy

What is your guidance on how to push leaders in companies, et cetera, to put these public statements into action and how should we be holding them accountable?

Jahan

Yeah, I would say that well I'm just gonna throw me in front a lot of like language out at you, but targeted universalism is a really amazing design practice that I encourage everyone to look up. And the thinking behind that is similar to what we've said, right?

An example of that is like curb cuts like a sidewalk. There's a groove in it. So folks who might be, let's say, in a wheelchair or able to move around, right. And that's what it was created for. And then it ended up benefiting all these other people like for parents, you have a stroller, all of a sudden you're like, wow, I can move. Or maybe you have a cane, like all these things. So people are not curves. Let's be clear. Like we're much more complex than that. So I'm going to be simplistic just to be simplistic. But to answer that question, I would always say to leaders, you want to go to who's being impacted the most right now, the conversation we're having this national conversation is around black folks or specifically with civic, black employees, how are you going to meet the needs and demands?

How are you going to design how you listen? How are you going to make sure that what you're creating is meeting their needs? Because often we're just creating things all the time. Like again, the presentation, right? I had this idea, it's going to be great, et cetera, et cetera. And it's, you're not actually creating a partnership, you know, with those posts. And that takes time. That takes time. You have to build trust. There is you know, how do you create something that's mutually beneficial, et cetera, but that's the place to start. And it seems like an obvious start, but it's, it hasn't been.

Boyuan

I'm going to jump into just add one thing to that. So there's this distinction that we've been using a lot in our work around ego design, where there is one person who is the decision maker. Yes. No, whatever. You know what that level of powering versus co-design, which is exactly what you Jahan has mentioned. How do we mutually benefit one another? How do we create partnerships? That's not just come in and do a focus group, come in. Let's do a listening session. Just one time. That's it. Right. How do we make this sustainable? And that's just a good framing for, to think about right now in terms of how to be global leaders.

Amy

Okay. Here's another one. What are strategies to make sure that when you work with the source community, you are not tokenizing, co-opting or subsuming them into the cultural default?

Boyuan

Oh girl. That's a whole other workshop. That's a whole long thing.

But one of the key things just to go back to the previous question is again about mutual, beneficial reality. That's just something that we can ask ourselves. Like we find out what would be beneficial.

Amy

Let's try this one. And how can we add diversity to our team? If we were rarely get diverse applicants, what can we do to adjust that?

Jahan

Well, we're in a unique situation in that. So many folks, not all, a lot of folks are working from home. That opens up if working from home where in a global community, like hiring people should actually be in my experience easier if you geographically, don't have access. Yeah. But I would think even before that, the question is why, yeah. Why, why do you want to do this? You know, why, why would they want to be on your team? What is your culture like? Yeah. Are you interested in centering what they have to say? Do you view them as experts or leaders? How will you send her that leadership or expertise?

Amy

Great place to start. So how would you recommend approaching this topic with leadership in an organization who have very white male culture default?

Boyuan

Well, I mean, one thing just from our consultancy personally, we were not here to convince people. So if people don't understand why this is the conversation to have about how do we create a future for all, then that might be a waste of time. Right. But it's really gauging somebody's readiness. They can be an all-white team and really into allyship. They could be really into investigating these core questions and around how do we distribute our power and agency so that other people can show up too. Right. So if those are the conversations that your white leadership are having. Then, you know, that's a prime opportunity to start bringing some of this thinking into it.

Jahan

But I feel that, I feel that question I feel for that question is a question that we get a lot and it's, it's really hard if people are suffering in these companies say people, I mean folks, I mean people of color, you know what I mean? Like specifically black folks suffering in these positions, you know, and what you can sometimes do more harm if you're going in and we're working with the team and they're like, woo hoo, yes, amped, let's get going. And we're excited. And leadership has been, is one of the number one cogs in the machine. So if the commitment isn't there, then we're just going to waste everyone's time and we don't have time to wait.

Amy

Absolutely. Okay. Here's another one. How do you manage the response of something is better than nothing when you are raising concerns about lack of equitable impact?

What do you see as the difference between a step on the journey and a lack of effort to deliver an impact that meets the needs of your community?

Jahan

I think it's in the follow through, you know, there has to be a balance of like we were on a call with a client recently and there was a lot of like heart-centered conversations that are happening. That's beautiful. That's great. And now how would that support it in action? And I don't mean action. Like it's diversity day with I'll have tacos action. You know what I mean? Like actually designing the systems and structures that have been rooted in rot or rotten to begin with. If those are working in parallel, then we can, things can start to shift on the other side. There's like kind of action, but there's no heart centeredness that also do harm. I don't know if I answered that question though. Amy, can you just repeat that question? I had a thought and it left.

Amy

How do you manage the response of something is better than nothing when you raising concerns about lack of equitable impact and what do you see as the difference between a step on the journey and a lack of effort to deliver an impact that meets the needs of your community?

Jahan

Okay. Right. So that is what I said. That's the first part of that question is more of the same. That's in the world of, we got to do something. Something's better than nothing. We got to do something. Okay. But then the outcomes of what's being produced, create an equity. It doesn't match up. It's almost like might as well do nothing. So that's just like more, it's more of the same.

Amy

How can we rethink the way we design for consumer targets when our consumer target research tells us to design for a white cultural default?

I thought I would really stump you guys with these questions.

Jahan

I think we're stumped all the time. Anyone that is here use it. This is the answer. Boom. See you it's been great, no naughty, very, very deep, deep issues. There's not like one answer. That's just going to solve something like this is actually a practice. And part of the answers, quote, unquote reside in the discovery and in the doing of it, you know, there are many services that we deliver where the framework is there, but then there are things to adjust. There were things to shift. There were things we discovered or when you say something,

Boyuan

Yeah, there's a lot of nuance. So we gave some examples. Like film that, you know, doesn't why doesn't need to consider race. Why doesn't need to consider gender. Why do we need to consider any of these things? And that's really what the framework is like a study in interrogation of those questions in a very beginning. But then there are products that are not for everybody, right? Actually, no product is meant for everybody, but there are specific products that are like a Rolex watch. That's not for all people. We know that because it's a very specific socioeconomic demographic. So if that is explicitly, so that maybe don't use the framework, however, there are nuances in terms of representation, who's in your marketing. Like all of those different things that this framework can aid in. But what we're talking about is creating outcomes that are better for people in harms way at the most. Right. So thinking about the benign examples, thinking about who, for instance you know, crash test dummies. So there are way more fatalities for women. Way, way more because the crash test dummy was built on a model of a average white male BMI, right? So things like that, we investigate further to prevent that mistake from happening. Cause why are so many women dying?

Boyuan

I like this one. How are y'all taking of yourselves? How are we taking care of ourselves? I love that question.

To be honest, we were oscillating between like deep rage and anger and all of that and possibility and excitement and energy, right? So it's like somewhere in that space and just like our frameworks does around intent versus impact, which is really it's slow design, it's slowed design. It doesn't mean that you do things slowly. It just means that you're more considered in your approach. I have tons of cultural people. I am jumping into doing work all the time writing 85 bazillion emails. And I think that this is something that needs to be embedded more in our own framework is like, how do we slow down? How do we not answer to all of the inquiries coming in right now, way to take care of ourselves? Because actually, we love this work. We really love what we do.

Amy

It's hard when you love it so much. And it's just a part of who you are. And I that's one of the first things I saw in you guys when we met initially was when you're so passionate about what you do, like stepping back from it is really hard. So you do need to do it though. Everyone's got to take care of themselves. So that was a great question.

Jahan

I think to question probably when you're working on something that's so fraught with so much pain and trauma and a history it's sometimes it's like, this is too much, you know, people, you need your people, you need community, you need times to restore. You need to have, like, you have to put that in. I do

want to address one of the questions. It's come up in a couple of different ways. How do you address coworkers and management who say they support diversity, but don't acknowledge bias, especially when issues are pointed out to them, but they don't think it's a problem.

There's two things about that. It is what's ideal, to be honest for us, is to work with a team when they have gone through some type of anti-racist training specifically, but that makes our work much easier. And I think what this person is pointing to is like, if you don't know why you're doing something, it's hard to build on top of it. You don't think there's a problem. And we have to acknowledge racism is very real and it's been around for centuries and it's what this country was founded on. And if we can't speak to the reality of that, how can we build and create anything new? How can we redesign? We can't even name what it is that we're facing, what it is that we're dealing with. And so definitely that makes it an easier entry point. Right? But the other thing is that this was related to another question someone asked around like almost protecting POC who might be in this environment and feel like, you know If we were coming into work, the first thing we're going to do is we're going to really create partnership with the black folks or the POC in the company. Here's the framework here, what it is that you want us to pull out? How are we going to partner on this? What do you want what's being that said right? It's like white managers or senior leadership to walk away with? But again, we have to censor that experience or else we could be causing more harm, you know, we're delivering on what maybe what white leadership thinks they want, but don't even know that they want. And it's not necessarily oppositional, right? But it's like, but that's where we start. And if there are people in the company, cause we're not working in the company, they're working in the company, they're experts. If it's like, you know what? I can't be in a room with this person because XYZ, or if I have, I've had this history or XYZ, like we need to know all of that. So we can actually co-create environment that's going to feel safe for them. That's always, that has to always be the starting point because then actually everyone can benefit.

Boyuan

Because you're never going to get diversity. So diversity is the goal, right. And the activity it's never going to stick. It's never going to be sustainable because you have not addressed the root cause. So what Jahan mentioned earlier about targeted universalism is that it's actually better for everybody in the company. It's better for the white leaders in the company. It's the better for everybody in the company. If everybody in the company feels like they have a voice and expertise to share and something purposeful and meaningful to dedicate their work to.

Jahan

And it's not kumbaya and it's not easy. It's not comfortable. It's not any of that. It is a challenge. Absolutely.

Amy

I feel like we could talk for days on that. Obviously you all do, but I just want to say, I just really appreciate you just being so transparent and teaching us and guiding us and giving us these tips and techniques and it's just super valuable. And I appreciate it very much.