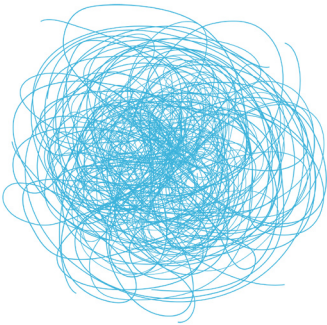




What are the Living Principles for Design?

October 2009

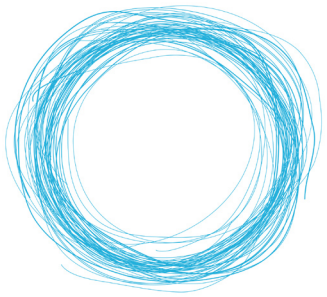
THE NEED



As one of the defining ideas of the 21st century, sustainability holds tremendous possibilities for the creative community, its business partners and society. And while 87% of recently surveyed AIGA members view sustainability as a top priority, many of them confess they are ill-equipped to apply its principles effectively.

Sustainability is complicated. The decentralized nature of resources, the complexities of the issues and the lack of filtering for how they relate to design appear to be the main barriers for turning motivation into action. Everyone wants to do the right thing, but no one relishes attacking this knowledge hairball.

THE APPROACH



The Living Principles for Design distill the collective wisdom found in decades of sustainability theories and bring them to life in the first quadruple bottom-line framework for design.

The Living Principles weave together environmental protection, social equity, and economic health — thus building upon commonly accepted, triple bottom-line frameworks. But most significantly, they incorporate cultural vitality because culture is where all aspects of sustainability find their way into the blood stream of society, and culture is where designers have the deepest impact as their creations and choices shape habits and values.

The Living Principles framework is a lens that brings clarity to integrated sustainability and makes it accessible, relevant and ready to put into action.

Use it in everything you do.

Share it.

Enrich it.

Teach it.

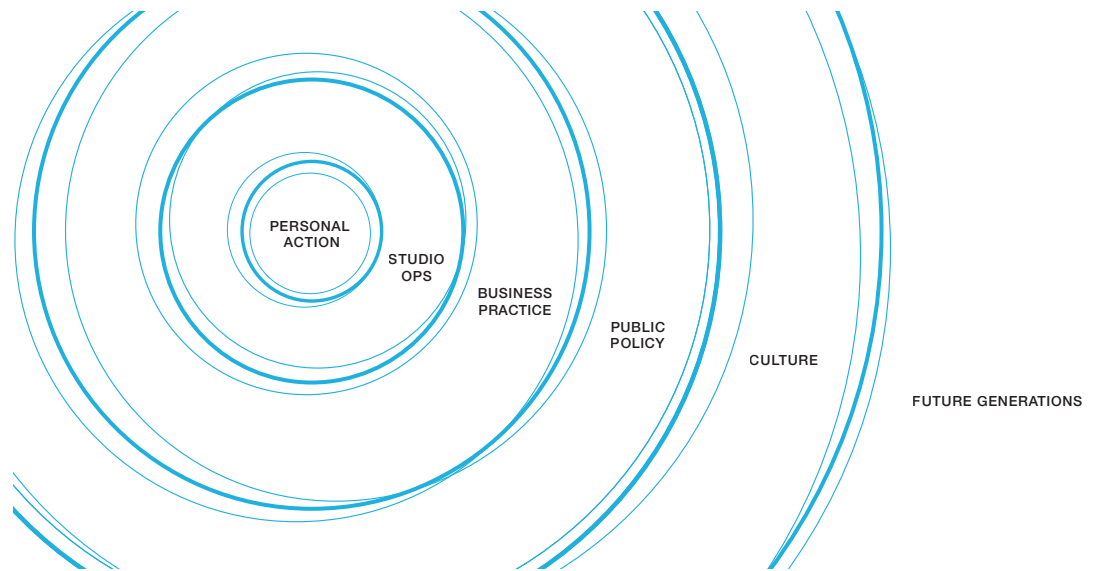
Live it.



The Framework

October 2009

DESIGN'S IMPACT



Design is a powerful conduit for change. As the messages, artifacts and experiences we create pass through the hands, minds and hearts of people, we have an opportunity to weave sustainability into the broader fabric of culture and to shift consumption and lifestyle aspirations to a more sustainable basis for living.

In order for individuals, societies, economies and the planet to flourish, we must support environmental responsibility, social equity, economic health and cultural vitality and recognize that they are inextricably linked. The Living Principles for Design form a practical framework that illustrates the confluence of these four streams – the key to sustainable design.

FOUR STREAMS OF INTEGRATED SUSTAINABILITY ¹

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Actions and issues that affect natural systems, including climate change, preservation, carbon footprint and restoration of natural resources.

SOCIAL EQUITY

Actions and issues that affect all aspects of society, including poverty, violence, injustice, education, healthcare, safe housing, labor and human rights.

ECONOMIC HEALTH

Actions and issues that affect how people and organizations meet their basic needs, evolve and define economic success and growth.

CULTURAL VITALITY

Actions and issues that affect how communities manifest identity, preserve and cultivate traditions, and develop belief systems and commonly accepted values.

¹ Adapted from Adam Werbach, *Strategy for Sustainability*, 2009



The Living Principles

DESIGN'S OPPORTUNITY

ENVIRONMENT

Design can visualize complex information and make it comprehensible and relevant. It can help invent new systems, products and services to deliver more value for less material and energy used. Design solutions that integrate environmental criteria at every step can overcome natural resource constraints, whether animal, plant, mineral, air or water.

SOCIETY

Designs and messages that are based on principles of inclusion, equality and empathy provide harmonious and healthy conditions in which all members of society can flourish. Design can visualize acute needs, raise awareness, prompt response, and affect policy to improve quality of life.

ECONOMY

Design thinking can help invent new economic and business models appropriate for 21st-century realities and set the foundation for a more sustainable world. Design's approach to investigation, analysis, and visualization can be leveraged to create opportunities and value for companies and people across all streams of sustainability.

CULTURE

Design can connect people with ideas, motivate behavior change, and shift mindsets. This transformative power can shape new values and provide a compelling understanding of sustainability that ensures its assimilation by a broad array of people, nations and cultures.

DESIGNERS' ROADMAP

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Learn and inform about the environmental impacts of choices and behaviors.

Consider intended and unintended ecological consequences of components over the entire lifecycle, including extraction of raw materials from nature, conversion of materials into artifacts, artifact use/reuse, transportation, disposal, and recycling.

Consider the entire supply chain. Seek sustainable suppliers and clean production technologies at every step. Plan to optimize shipping volumes and transportation distances.

Eliminate waste. Maximize use of recycled, recyclable and compostable materials. Plan for use of materials in continuous cycles including disassembly, ease of recovery, take-back programs, upcycling and recycling.

Avoid the use of any substances that may cause environmental damage to air quality, water or the earth.

Consider appropriate durability to make artifacts last longer or decompose more easily. Design for multiple functions and reparability to encourage reuse.

Minimize energy use. Maximize use of clean energy sources such as wind and solar in manufacturing, transportation and product use.

SOCIAL EQUITY

Create messages, artifacts, services and experiences that respond to the needs of all people, celebrate beauty and promote and enable joyful, healthy living.

Consider intended and unintended consequences for individuals and communities from all components over the entire lifecycle, including impacts on human toxicity, water pollution, cancer causing potential, resource depletion and climate change.

Understand the ethical supply chain to ensure that products and services are manufactured under safe and fair labor conditions, supporting human rights and basic needs like sufficient pay, healthcare and benefits.

Minimize environmental, health and safety risks to employees and communities involved in manufacturing, use, and end-of-life scenarios with safe technologies, facilities and operating procedures.

ECONOMIC HEALTH

Understand financial parameters and ensure that solutions meet market criteria for performance and cost.

Communicate truthfully and with transparency.

Understand and communicate sound business values and short- and long-term benefits of sustainable solutions including efficiency, competitive advantage, profitability, increased sales, brand equity and employee morale.

Consider and encourage business models that incorporate product take-back systems, end-of-life product collection, product upgrading and material recycling.

Consider solutions that turn products into lease or service models.

Consider equitable systems of corporate ownership and governance, such as co-ops.

CULTURAL VITALITY

Create messages, artifacts, services and experiences that provide people with choices that can change attitudes and redefine prosperity.

Support and promote the uniqueness of different cultures and recognize that highly functional systems like eco-systems and human communities are resilient because of their diversity.

Consider historical, place-based, social, cultural and economic contexts to make design and messaging culturally relevant and to preserve local cultures.

Promote desirable visions that compel people to want to live sustainably.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

The Living Principles for Design are meant to guide purposeful action. They will evolve, grow and draw openly from a wide range of professional practices.

Join our feedback loop on [Facebook](#) and help create and share tried-and-true best practices, guidelines, tools, ideas, case studies, and general support for a broad range of design disciplines, including:

Communication Design
Packaging Design
Experience Design
Interaction Design
Fashion Design
Industrial Design
Architecture/Interior Design
Service Design



About the Living Principles

Created by the AIGA Center for Sustainable Design (CFSD), the Living Principles for Design were born out of the design profession’s need for an aspirational and actionable framework that provides designers and their clients with a common understanding of the core facets of sustainability and enables them to take action. Its ongoing development is dependent on the contributions of the design community at large. Conceived and developed over the summer of 2009, the Living Principles were officially unveiled at the AIGA Design Conference in Memphis on October 9, 2009.

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The seeds of the Living Principles sprouted in February 2009, at the Compostmodern conference, and were cultivated at other events like Adobe Systems’ Sustainability Roundtable in the spring. Genesis of this specific approach began at the AIGA Leadership Retreat in Portland in June 2009. The core architects emerged from that event, pulled together the Genealogy research document, and invited an inter-disciplinary advisory board to a strategy summit in San Francisco in August. The harvest of that day’s activities found its way into the Living Principles, which were vetted across a wide review board.

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JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Join our feedback loop on [Facebook](#) and help us create and share tried-and-true best practices, guidelines, tools, case studies, and general support for a broad range of design disciplines.