

Studio Every

Start including people: Perspectives and considerations for inclusive design.

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Introduction:

We believe that inclusive design in everyday products will soon be a necessity, rather than a token gesture.

For that reason, we set about having conversations with leading experts and trailblazers in the inclusivity arena.

This book is the result of those conversations.

Excerpts in the document come from:

Jade Smith – Royal School for the Blind

Leo Yound – Good Nugget

Andrew Fifield – Architecture PLB

Bryce Johnson – Microsoft

Some background statistics:

An estimated 1.3 billion people experience significant disability. This represents 16% of the world's population, or 1 in 6 of us: World Health Organization

Inclusive teams are over 35% more productive: LinkedIn / McKinsey

Diverse teams make better decisions 87% of the time: LinkedIn / McKinsey

The Web Accessibility Initiative was introduced in 1999.

The first accessible design standard (in the US) was for Buildings and Facilities in 1961

Intro quote:

“If you're a brand and you're thinking about your growth, you need to consider how to reach more people. The companies that embrace a diverse industry will start to realise the benefit to them.”

Leo Young – Good Nugget

Key Considerations for Inclusive Design:

1. An eco-system of layers
2. No-one person knows it all
3. Design can be the magic
4. We're all human
5. Be prepared to hustle & fight
6. The standard or unique paradox
7. Progress over perfection
8. Building a culture

1. An eco-system of layers

When we set out to include more people, needs and considerations are vast, which can often make inclusive design overwhelming.

Rather than chasing a big single solution, think how an eco-system with lots of compatible solutions can combine to include more people.

Define the fundamental aspect that works for all, then clearly layer on top elements for specific needs.

“I think a lot of people still want the notion of one size fits all. For us, it’s one size fits one.”

Bryce Johnson - Microsoft

“What we think about in hardware design, and we're going to be publishing some material on this soon, is a spectrum of: Devices, accessories, augmentations.”

Bryce Johnson - Microsoft

“The building on its own can’t do it all.”

Andrew Fifield – Architecture PLB

“In conclusion, I think great building design should deliver aspects which work and relate to as wide an audience as possible: such as good access, navigation, light levels, acoustics, joyful experiences.

But there are instances where specific attributes need to be layered in above all those other aspects if it is to work for a certain need.

And there are times when a very special environment for a group of people is required for them to go on to be included in society.”

Andrew Fifield – Architecture PLB

2. No-one person knows it all

Nobody can know everything about inclusivity, since every facet of the topic is a specialism in its own right.

However, the right questions at the right time are powerful. Consider the right moments to engage with people to learn more.

“From my experience, you don't have to become an expert and you're not going to be each time.

You rely on other people.

We relied heavily on staff at the schools and when it got to the technical side, we rely on someone like an acoustic consultant.”

Andrew Fifield – Architecture PLB

“For one project, classroom acoustics was key as I learned very quickly that a deaf child's world isn't necessarily silent.”

Andrew Fifield – Architecture PLB

“I don't believe in this simplistic, empathetic idea that you can put yourself in someone else's shoes. We emphasize: ‘nothing about us without us.’”

Bryce Johnson - Microsoft

“What we do and I think all architects or designers should do: get in and meet the end users. Try to get a personal understanding of them and gain an experience of who you're designing for. Regulations are fine, but I don't think anything replaces spending a day with them.”

Andrew Fifield – Architecture PLB

“I hope where inclusive design is going is a recognition that like there is no code to crack. There’s just a lot of hard work and tuning.”

Bryce Johnson - Microsoft

“I did go back when it was completed to speak with staff and pupils about how they were getting on.”

Andrew Fifield – Architecture PLB

3. Design can be the magic

Many voices and expertise can provide critical inputs to achieving success (see 02 'No-one knows it all').

Design is well positioned to bring synthesis to all these inputs. That magical moment when all the factors are considered, and the outcome is greater than the sum of its parts.

“As an architect, I felt very keenly with the deaf school that the support I received in understanding deafness was critical, but on its own doesn't get you a good building. It was just as important to make sure the building was pointing in the right direction and the quality of light was right, as we had been gifted this amazing site at the top of the hill overlooking a valley.

Success comes from the combination of experts and our central role.”

Andrew Fifield – Architecture PLB

“I think from a design perspective, diversity can create more authentic and real stories.”

Leo Young – Good Nugget

“You cannot put the responsibility of design onto non-designers. That's just not fair.”

Bryce Johnson - Microsoft

“I think an architect is a bit like a film director, or chef, or conductor. You bring people together to facilitate a collaborative, informed process: then you give it shape.”

Andrew Fifield – Architecture PLB

4. We're all human

Whilst delivering inclusive design might feel complex, the outcomes and goals are often the same. As humans we often desire or want to experience similar things.

How can we enable the functional relevance and emotional resonance that all human beings would desire, for the right audience?

“I’m of the opinion that technology should be used to assist and support independence, not to replace it.”

Jade Smith – Royal School for the Blind

“What is AI going to do to make someone with disabilities be able to do something independently for the first time? That’s what I’m most interested in.”

Bryce Johnson - Microsoft

“You know deaf children need a good view as much as a non-deaf child.”

Andrew Fifield – Architecture PLB

“We hear it loud and clear from the community: ‘I deserve nice things.’”

Bryce Johnson - Microsoft

5. Be prepared to hustle & fight

Inclusivity can't happen overnight, but creating momentum and energy will bring about progress quicker. Hack and hustle to make things happen and show results. That's how the ground swell will happen.

Consider intervention points that different people might oversee to build a balance - think about the stages of understanding, creating, making and testing and where inclusivity can be introduced more and more.

“The Royal School for the Blind is a real lesson in how to create a space for children to thrive. Hacks and modifications around the space are a hint to what we should see in all buildings.

Indications that you're at the end of stairs, tactile shapes to signal a classroom on the right, and fragrance rooms to know which room you are in.

It's a multi-sensory playground. It is a masterclass in how harnessing sensory cues can help children gain independence.”

Kelly Dawson – Studio Every

“Jade brings a design mindset to her role where she has hacked and prototyped new ways for children to learn braille. She has an energy that is infectious.”

Kelly Dawson – Studio Every

“There has been some hustle along the way. The first version of the Inclusive Tech Lab was a bunch of equipment and toolboxes under my desk that I'd pull out when needed. The very first version of a space was as a 'roommate', to a testing team.”

Bryce Johnson - Microsoft

“For us it’s been a story of fighting and asking for forgiveness.

You know, the Adaptive Controller project would get cancelled many times. And the team would just still work on it.

What does this mean? You need people with a rebellious streak to just keep pushing forward.”

Bryce Johnson - Microsoft

6. The standard or unique paradox

Think about familiarity for the person engaging with a product. How can elements already recognisable in society be used, so unnecessary confusion isn't created.

Once those are in place, then explore any uniqueness needed, such as brand equity.

“I think that braille would reach a wider audience if it was universally present coinciding with all standard print, and why shouldn't it be?”

Jade Smith – Royal School for the Blind

“Tactile braille is reliable and consistent. Therefore, I think no matter what new technology appears on the market, we will always revert back to this trustworthy system.”

Jade Smith – Royal School for the Blind

“There is plenty of other guidance in terms of designing buildings for disability, such as level thresholds for wheelchair access. But you should be designing that in, whether it's a public building, or not.”

Andrew Fifield – Architecture PLB

“Specific aspects should be built on top of logical common factors.”

Andrew Fifield – Architecture PLB

7. Progress over perfection

As we've outlined, the challenge of inclusivity is big: so the key is to simply start. Make mistakes, hack with prototypes but above all, learn.

It takes time to embed the right thinking in an organisation, so the sooner progress is made, the easier conversations will become.

“It takes a long time.

We see a lot of people come in and say, ‘You guys are so advanced.

How did you get here?’ The reality is, we started earlier than them.”

Bryce Johnson - Microsoft

When you have been a designer, you're always seeking perfection and that you're not happy with something until it's 100%, right?

Now, I set some expectations of myself but also know when to let things go. That's been a real lesson: that I'm always learning and I don't know all the answers.

Leo Young – Good Nugget

8. Building a culture

Rather than rely on checklists and process that might not have been bought into, focus on organically building a culture from within.

Harness individual's passion, consider recruitment techniques and don't rule out reaching out to other organisations who are inspiring with their inclusivity progress.

“I wanted to sit in a room where everybody's got different ideas to bring.”

Leo Young – Good Nugget

“I think diversity is such a broad word. I think the easiest way for people to understand is through geographical terms, but when we talk about it, we say diversity is very wide.

You just want the biggest melting pot of different people in one space to bring their rich cultural and social experience into this amazing thing that you're going to create.”]

Leo Young – Good Nugget

“Having people in the organization to constantly represent the community is crucial.”

Bryce Johnson - Microsoft

“I've worked for some amazing agencies, but I felt how we hired and nurtured people was very old fashioned. We weren't thinking outside the box.”

Leo Young – Good Nugget

Closing Thoughts

1. (Just) get started: Recruitment, conversations, approach.
 2. Involve real people: Then figure out your role.
 3. You'll make mistakes: Modify, try again, hustle.
 4. Sweat the execution: Don't forget to craft beautiful details.
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