

Interview transcription

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Interviewee: TK at 'S' Design consultancy in West London

1. Do you find differences between Eastern based client (organization) and western based clients (organizations) in terms of their priorities/preferences/expectation for design? (electronics companies)

Although Western-based companies also need rational explanation, in case of Japanese companies including Korean companies, they much tend to ask for much more rational explanations, comparing to Western-based companies – e.g. why design has to be done like this? Because they need to convince other people in their company
e.g. A Japanese company: the personnel who is in charge of the project, working with him, need to convince the design ideas with his boss after the design project. So for his presentation, he needs good reason to justify the design

Design project based on rational thinking explanation

Design project in japan and korea required of more rational explanation

Hierarchical orders

Demanding/precise

Delivering information to the boss/colleagues from the project is prioritised

Decision is sometimes made behind the line

In Japanese company design project demanding and precise reasoning for reporting to a boss

A person who is in charge of the project has little authority

Design project required of multiple report line

On the other hand, in western company,

Firstly, in terms of culture, if the design idea is good, (e.g. aesthetic) there is no reason to choose the design behind the decision.

Secondly, the personnel who is in charge of the project has more responsibility. He doesn't need to convince with any people in the organization in order to make sure if the design is good.

The west

Respect of ideal aesthetic : expertise are prioritised

Personnel in charge has more responsibility

Design expertise and professionals can be respected, rather than prioritising relationship between the top and personnel

2. How about degree of importance of conceptual ideation process for new design between nationalities? Do you have any challenges to come up with conceptual ideas if the Japanese and Korean companies ask for more rational explanation during projects?

In term of concept design, the company (Seymourpowell) is heavily focusing on the process. This is not thinking of designer. This is also carried out by design research team within a process, which is useful to get a goal. This is also useful to explain a concept to a client in presentation.

Design project is required of process : design research

(For example) The key thing, especially, for a Japanese client is to be very careful to explain about the process in a slide of presentation. This is not to be said as rational process exactly, but the presentation should be more careful to explain it in more rational way for Japanese clients
But concept design itself is still rational process behind it

In Japan, formalization and rational approach is more prioritised
 Abstract idea is carefully explained with rationales in formalization activities
 Concept design as exploratory rationale itself, but hardly explained

Is it meant that Japanese clients ask for more and more rational explanation even in the concept design process, comparing to Western-based ?

Yes.

What about presentation with Japanese clients? (Atmosphere/ attitude)

They are quiet. They don't ask question. It is our nature. In Japan culture of meeting is sharing, whereas in here (Western; the UK) the point of meeting is to make a decision. This is really different. In Japan purpose of meeting is 'share' but here purpose of meeting is 'decision making'. So the share means that you don't need to raise your opinion because that is meant you don't understand what you say. That is it.

Japan: meeting defined as sharing only

Not necessary to raise individual idea

Speaking out meant for ridicule: precise understanding of meeting contents required

The West: meeting aimed at decision making

Have you ever met Korean clients? What about the Korean clients?

In principle, mostly similar (with Japanese)... but in his personal opinion a difference is that they are even more rational meaning more traditional company structure.

What is the meaning of 'rational'?

(It means asking) 'why'...'why'...'why'...

For you, is it (a sort of) challenging?

Yes !

Do you prepare for lots of things to do for Korean clients?

Yes

What kinds of companies have done do so...?

(Initial) S and L....sorts of...

In Korea: Similar with Japan – Samsung and LG

But more demanding and traditional structure

Rational and explanatory reasoning meant for demanding and challenge to an individual designer

I think this is a kind of hierarchy things both in Korea and Japan similarly. Boss after boss and next to boss and boss again...after a project you need to explain what you are going to be done to him, him... him...(your boss). You thus need to be confident to give evidence to explain it.

Japan and Korea

Multiple and sub hierarchy pervades

Unique hierarchical culture causes complexity of organization and design project in decision making and formalization

Lower level followers are required to show precisely delivery of information and reasoning

3. As a designer how do you feel about such meeting place which is just for sharing with such clients, Korean and Japanese?

It used to makes me feel like wasting time because nobody ask any question. But having said that...I understand it. I don't get disappointed at it because there is feedback in right moment, for example, during a drinking place.

(Feedback and sharing more information in drinking place, rather than a meeting place) this is common for Japanese (including Korean), and it seems to be almost stupid and disappointed at people who don't have any questions. But this is culture, that should be changed in some occasions.

Japan and Korea

Sharing ideas in meeting place is within limited boundary and hesitated

Informal meeting place is preferred to share additional and core details on the project – e.g. drinking place

Sharing and decision making in additional place is irrational but cultural matter

As a designer does such organizational culture affect open design/ communication/ innovation – i.e. open design context?

Yes I think so. (Especially) English language (itself) is really good for discussion and made for discussionand for 'debate'. It is constructive language for debate and language for discussion. Whereas, I don't know about exactly Korean language as I speak Korea almost none, but Japanese language is for sharing what you are thinking and what you are guessing something...more passive (And more likely to be mitigate to look at what is going on)

Matter of language

English as most optimised language for debate and discussion

Japanese language shown as mitigating and indirect expression /passive

So is language also a factor of affecting....?

Yes. Language is definitely affect behaviors and influences a form of discussion. Language forms thoughts. Thought forms behavior. Behavior forms culture. Yes in open innovation, (language) is really important. For that reason people from here are much better of it because of language, culture and so on

Language as reflection of collective individuals

Western (English) take advantage of openness in languages

4. So, do you also think if Korean and Japanese company is more difficult to have an opportunity of open design, innovation and so on?

Yes, absolutely, they can do it but they will do challenge more to do so because of language and structure of organization, and power of a responsibility of each individual personnel (who is in charge of a project). And procedure and many obstacles reside.

For example, in case of my friend who works for a major Japanese company and can think big he makes huge change there and the company's reacting is very well to his ideas and dream.

Obstacles of open innovation in the East : Japan

Power: authority of individual in charge

Organizational structure : procedures

Language in use

Talented and passionate individual can foster to change organizational culture

5. If so, what make there available to change now?

Good question. Two things... One is a sense of urgency, that is, "i have to change" , which is kind of happening(now), but not everyone. Obviously CEO thinks that they should think of it like that. But this is not necessarily for everyone. For example, ' I am ok here, I have been here for 20

years . And I am safe. That kind of attitude... in a positive sense it creates really warm and sophisticated society, which I personally really value, however, it is not really good for business...

Does it mean that still there are some of them who hesitate to be changed within a hierarchy because of hierarchy, despite hardship of market situation?

Yes, perhaps in their mind that (reluctance of changing) seems to be less-risks.

Uncertainty and risks make foster organization change

Change from the top, but indulgence pervade in traditional and stable organization structure

Indulgence of individual causes negativity in organization

Indulgence in personal safety vs. stability in collective secure

Reluctance of change felt as securing in individual levels

The other example of this is individual effort. For example, his friend, he has worked for the company and he knows he is good and a skilled person and has an experienced network in the company. He knows he can change it. But at the same time, he doesn't mind being criticized and afraid of having annoying opinion

If people like his friend in the company are growing the company can be changed.

Passionate personal should deserve criticism in Japan : personnel in an organization somehow grown up based on interpersonal skills and experienced networking

6. If so, on the other hand, what have made the company not changed and stable for a last decade?

A lot of people says that they are still in dream of success that many Japanese company had been successful for last twenty or thirty years. another reason is that people didn't listen on how they can be failed, previously, but now more people try listen. This is change.

And more global educated and experienced people are growing like his people, but it hasn't been happened in last decade. There are not people who can understand design, English and business and who can understand foreign country. They were quite rare. Those people are growing now in Japan. My personal goal is to balance this good western influenced approach with Japanese traditional value such as sharing nature, work in harmony, safe comfortable sophisticated society.

In Japan

An organizational indulgence causing myopia

Past success can cause organizational arrogance – silo thinking

Growing understanding about failure by educated persons

In Japan, lack of diversity

And lifestyle and mentality of people towards career are different from the past. In the past if a person get a job the career in the company has lasted for entire his life. But now every circumstance is changing

No company can guarantee an individual's career at all within a company, does it?

Yes I agree.

Lay-off and job turn-over are rarely happened in Japan

Risks of individual grown due to economic recession

7. What do you think about precision driven effective Japanese companies' NPD process, which has been successful for last decades (e.g. JIT, resource management and so on)?

Sony, Panasonic and so on in Japan have been successful well in technology advanced market. So advanced technology has been meant advancement of the company (in terms of technology). So everyone think about which is better spec. e.g. thinner screen, bigger screen, MP3 function etc. that has been all about it. But now this is not all of it. it is matter of proposition, (consumer) experience, software, service.

Now, our experience is getting more and more multiple layers, dimensions. In the past people have paid for bigger screen before. Now people pay for new experience. That's reason why Japanese company has been creative but not now. Technology is really important and Japanese well work for it to make sense by working more and longer to make 'bigger'. Now, it's more like intangible quality thinking. That's what we need to deliver to market.

Japanese companies focused on advanced technology: Little consideration of human aspect
Multiple human experiences should be considered: users pay for better experience
Incremental technology development –push can achieve viable and feasible outcome
Intangible quality thinking should be delivered for better human centric product design

As a designer do you think that such phenomenon can make you feel challenging?

They don't actually do this for us (the design consultancy: Seymourpowell). They know that that seems a bit silly to ask to work much harder like them. They want to see quality rather than quantity.

A relationship between client and consultancy as agent model

Quality design idea is always required by the client, rather than quantity

8. On the other hand, what do you think about their in-house designers, for instance, Sony and...in Japanese companies? Can they struggle to challenge those?

Yes I think so. Again, (for example) meeting culture they spend like for 8 hours for doing meeting in day time. But time for design actually starts with after 6 o'clock. Not everyone. but it's actually happening for some of them, which is just bad for designers who should be creative. When quantity matters is post industrial revolution and rapid economic growth era, stay working late may works but when quality matters, which is now, we need to carefully think about how we work.

In Japanese organization

Internal design group shown harsh and tougher

Preparation of meeting (formalization)/ Lack of time for design ideation: Quality creative thinking is hardy for internal designers

Quantity based design mindset came from post industrial revolution /Rapid economic growth

Working hard itself has been respected

9. Despite long history of design and manufacturing of Japan, (comparing to other Asian countries) why do you think that they do so?

Because it is working. It was fine when industrial revolution happened and when technology was a matter. Way they did and way they were doing were the best 10 years ago and 20 years ago. But not now.

Incremental technology development can be achieved relatively with short and incremental efforts

What do you think about Japanese company next?

Not everyone but 10 – 20 % of companies need to be more creative. Somebody needs to have direction. Other body need to work toward there...

When I look back my design experience in terms of rational evidence, (happy experience) to talk about kind of happy experience we cannot talk about and explain in rational way. It is just validated by human being. Sometimes meeting with some companies they need to say

"yes this is good idea, this is good experience. We don't need to have any number (and then) go for us. It's not easy. It is for many reasons. It makes sense that reason why I am here. As a bridge it might be better I am staying here **between-crazy (creative) person** in the company, Seymourpowell and hardworking people from Japan. If I went back to Japan now I might be put in a big system and become like a person who is **just** noisy, loud and crazy guy.

(As I think including some Japanese people working for here) there are **very few** place to go back (to Japan) because Japanese society and companies doesn't have a proper platform to be able to utilise such a person like me.

Design leadership is required for leading the whole industry ecosystem and paradigm in Japan
Design ideas often shown as difficult for validation with numeric and nominal tools

In Japan an individual member is only belonging to a group as a part of an organization

Difference is often not acceptable : collectivism

shown often stronger collective embodiment against a different individual

10. When it comes to Japanese electronic companies' product, how do you think about it in terms of being focusing on advanced technology? (Problematic?)

Yes I think so. It's just thinking behind it(is basic). This is old fashioned way of thinking which is technology only. But again, this is not anymore. For example, Sony, they now talk that experience is important. Now mindset is changing. But it's somehow difficult to change the internal process of the organization.

Japanese organization

Achievement of incremental technology shown as limitation

Creating new human experience is the matter of future product

Change towards intangible quality ideas shown as challenges in internal organization

11. What do you think about their product platform which can embrace other types of and other companies' products within a product platform – i.e. compatibility 1

This is really problem and really big issue. One thing is psychological distance that they have from the rest of the world as well as physical distances that they have. Japanese market is so unique so that they will be ok not to care about other market. If you want to sell product to Japanese you should keep going on within that process. So they didn't need to talk to other people to have a sort of share platform before.

Japanese market - platform strategy and industry ecosystem

Uniqueness of market hesitate to open from company

Closed society ambience cause less necessity of opening

Growing needs by multiple channel asking change to 'open'

But if you go to Tokyo lots of people have iPhone. So it's to emerge now. it is also (affected by) internet, Facebook, YouTube...Japanese people that are thought as people consumers in Japan is(accessing to)information is not just only from television advert, but also from internet, Facebook, SNS etc. they see the TV from Samsung and TV from Sony on the same day from here. Or they see Go-Pro camera from US or Cyber-shot from Sony on the same day **from the same blog**. So...there is no information hierarchy anymore. So Japanese companies are obviously competing with like everyone in this planet. Therefore (it is) rare relevant to sharing platform that you say.

Less hierarchical information transferring tool foster to understand differences and diversity emerging from globe

Confronting with challenges of Japanese company against growing needs of openness

The challenges reflected in platform strategy – less open platform

This is (matter of) balance internally (organization)...profitability...which you make a profit more. If you have only a memory stick (for) Sony camera so people buy memory stick so...people make money for it. If SD is more popular obviously people don't buy this. People don't want to buy a memory stick because people already have SD card. If you can want to use it for other computer...I am not actually an expert on this... (...) It's just balance, isn't it?

For example, game industry. If you have open platform you can invite more people like app. but then Nintendo has the software for only Nintendo. so we have a really nice console you can make a good profit out of the console, which is balance ...which is bringing more money into the company....Global tendency is going toward shared platform so that Japanese companies are thinking of that. But traditionally Sony...Nintendo... PanasonicNikon...they are having...used to have...still have now closed platform which is (able to be) bringing more profit now. **This unfortunately creates the environment where companies don't collaborate for greater outcome which is always better for consumers.**

So...is it (having open platform) matter of profitability?

This (product) is not thought of from consumer. If you think about it from consumer shared platform is much better because we(consumers) have much more choices

Granted benefits from given business platform model causes challenges to change

Significance of open platform for prospective users

In Japan

Traditional business platform shown as closed within own internal platform

Tendency to focus on current financial profits

The more open can lead the more prospective opportunity

12. Why do you think if they do so, although most of the Japanese companies you mentioned have been already established in terms of financial and technology aspects historically?

It is fair for them to think about profit, (that is) first of all, (the thing is) the company in there to make a profit to keep going on (and) to spend more money for research on it. It's OK for them to think about profit. It's fair. But problem isthey haven't shifted their mind-set towards open platform which could make more profit **as well**.... Closed platform has made more cash for them and then they think that maybe open platform is more profit too but still (they are) hesitating it. Because they are **conservative**.

Making money from existing model –closed model

Change to open platform seems to be another investment or cost

Hesitation to change implies conservativeness

13. This looks like dilemmatic situation now, don't you? in terms of making a profit between open and closed?

The reasons why they are here now is only thing that they have been here. They choose to be here now (is) they chose to be where they choose there. It's more difficult to change to be safe.

They want to change it and ...in my opinion....for them to change faster if they work with foreign companies like the company (Symourpowell) **but** it is more difficult to change internally for them. It is much easier to have a guide (from) like us to a sort of quick start...and gradually change internally. That's what I am saying to Japanese companies or government....

Successful old fashioned industry platform model can cause reluctance of change and collective indulgence

Collective indulgence from past success cause difficulty of change, internally

External stimuli help to foster to change faster : e.g. design consultancies as exoskeleton kept away from

Radical change in organizational level can often come from the top – national and the top of the organization

14. Lastly, as you conclude, what is the best organization for open innovation or open design in your mind, especially, in electronics companies?

It is really good for me to think of it. One thing is....Japanese companies' attitude towards, for example, the company, Seymourpowell...has been changed for a last decade. Japanese companies used to be ...using us as not so slave...but people under them *even for us*...we have console and TV (projects) to make variations for it within three months by coming up with WOW ideas within the period, for example....But now it is much more likely to be equal. They respect our opinion and experience *which is right partnership to achieve greater*. The attitude is more likely to be..."What do you think about this?", "Are we doing OK?". That's really good. Because every project in any level such as government, companies, individuals and so on partnership is really important to accept opinions. So that one definition of a good company is to be a sort of flexible and open to have a partnership. That's a kind of one aspect of it.

Significance of appropriate partnership between stakeholders

Previous Japanese company approaches

Valued 'time'

Valued multiple variation of product lines – quantity based

Current Japanese company's approach

Relationship between stakeholders in challenges of opening innovation

Other thing on it is kind of cultural differences. In Europe, there has been more examples of really strong leaders that people work for him, for example, Steve Jobs and James Dyson. They are opinion leaders with strong visions to bring people forward. So in the Western world it is still working...strong leader and the rest of them follow him.

Stronger top –down with shared vision can foster to carry out visionary and holistic design approach

But at least in Japan it is much difficult. It's almost like 'middle-up'. So in the Western it's more like 'top-down' structure. In Japan it's more like middle-up. Because there are many clever people in middle level, experienced, more accept to cultivate things, and more people who have management skills. "How do we make unit that they decide?" , push ideas to a boss, "what do you think of this, boss?". So, every person says Apple and Dyson are good examples.

In Japan, middle level position's role is heavy

But multiple serial hierarchy is often observed

Authority in middle level is relatively weak

But I don't want to say that that is the ideal cases for, for example, Japanese and Korean companies. That's not easy to learn because nature of culture is different. So, what we need to do is that is...as we talked previously... evaluation process needs to be changed. It shouldn't be cultivated by rational decision making (only). It should embrace emotional source and emotional decisions. It (the decision) can be made by middle level. Then, Japanese companies will be much, much better. In conclusion, if middle level person in a company can empower to change by giving their decision making power to their boss as a boss doesn't say too much things to make a decision as well as emotional decision making.

In Japan and Korea organization

Rational based decision making preferred

Abstract & conceptual things are ridicule

Unobservable, tacit and implicit elements of design decision are hardly addressed with rational and explanatory reasoning to report for the superiors

Insisting change like Apple or Dyson seems very difficult. I think we need to have (own) better Asian business management model.

Cultural differences in organizations from the West is difficult to adopt the Western organizational model for design project

- Empowering middle level position's authority is important to raise the extent of role of middle level position in decision making process in Japanese organizations

- Middle level can be as a moderator

- Differences in Japan and Korea from the West obviously existed and it can cause difficulty for design project