Realizing Human-centered Policy through Design Thinking

The application of "design thinking," which adopts the user's perspective, has generated a variety of innovations in the world of business. More recently, attention in the public sector has also come to be focused on approaches that incorporate design thinking in policymaking. In this issue of *My Vision*, we discuss the significance of design thinking and the issues facing its practical application.

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 – Searching for models in the field will generate policy innovation

Shigeki Uno

NIRA Executive Vice President, / Professor, Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo

Keywords…Models to be referred to, designs that users want to use, sources of new ideas, preparation by the administration, flexibility and ability to take action will be touchstones

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Realizing Human-centered Policy through Design Thinking

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CEO, Danish Design Center (DDC)

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President, Concent, Inc. / Professor, Institute of Innovation, Musashino Art University

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CEO and Chief Strategic Designer, BIOTOPE Co., Ltd.

Keywords…Realization of happiness for diverse individuals through policy, visualization of citizens' attitudes, policy labs as neutral organizations

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Realizing Human-centered Policy through Design Thinking

– Searching for Models in the Field will generate Policy Innovation

Shigeki Uno

NIRA Executive Vice President, / Professor, Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo

In the past, there were always models to refer to when thinking out policies. The Japanese governments of the Meiji period, which advanced the modernization of the country with the western nations as a model, are well-known examples. Until recently, "advanced cases" represented the most significant axis of reference in the advancement of policy.

Today, however, such models are difficult to find. The image of single-track modernization is a thing of the past. Rather, we discover issues at various sites and search for methods for their solution. Having said that, however, in comparison to the era in which clear models were available, both issues and solutions have diversified, and the problems have only become more difficult. Is there a way of thinking suited to such an era? The proposal offered by this issue of *My Vision* is design thinking.

Adopting the Perspective of the Citizens who are the Focus of the Policy

Dr. Christian Bason, CEO of the Danish Design Center, defines design thinking as "methods, processes and means of creating "human-centered" products, services, solutions and experiences." While policy formation up to the present has relied on data collection and analysis and the determination of rational solutions, design thinking, by contrast, adopts the perspective of the citizens and businesses who represent the end users of the policy. Policy is formulated in a process of co-creating ideas with these citizens and businesses and subjecting them to repeated testing. Dr. Bason tells us that this type of design thinking is being trialed in nations including the UK and the Scandinavian nations.

Similarly, Visiting Professor Hirokazu Okumura, Managing Director of the Open Governance Network, emphasizes the concept of thinking about policies that will actually reach citizens *in cooperation with* those citizens, with "empathy" as the main axis for proceeding, rather than relying exclusively on the perspective of the administrative providers of the policy. For example, in the case of homeless people, we would listen to what homeless people have to tell us and observe the places in which they live. In the case of abused children, we would think about how institutions such as orphanages and children's welfare centers look through the eyes of the children. The aim is, through dialogue and observation, to search out the real feelings of the individuals involved, which even they may not be aware of. What is required is for governments to make data public, and to test ideas together with citizens within a design thinking framework.

Initiatives have also commenced in Japan

What is the background to the need for this type of design thinking? Professor Atsushi Hasegawa of Institute of Innovation of Musashino Art University, and also the President of Concent, Inc., indicates that it is required because this is an era in which "massive changes are

occurring, the future is unclear, problems are becoming increasingly complex, and we do not know the sure and correct responses to the situation." Precisely in such an unpredictable era, it is necessary to lay the groundwork to enable us to prepare for an uncertain future, but the Japanese government is averse to taking risks. "Abduction" (hypothesis formation), the derivation of hypotheses from the results of small initiatives and the reapplication of those hypotheses, is surely the suitable method for such an era.

We already have practical examples of this. Kunitake Saso, the CEO of BIOTOPE Co., Ltd., is conducting a citizen participation project that seeks to create a future vision for the Tama River basin area. The project is looking at the ways in which it will be possible to work and play using the unique characteristics of the area. This attempt to link the basin area's residents, businesses and administration within a design thinking framework that takes lifestyles as the starting point is a valuable experiment. Mr. Saso additionally points out that the principle of administrative neutrality makes it impossible to incorporate the opinions of particular citizens, creating the need for neutral and independent organizations such as policy labs.

We also have examples of initiatives sparked on the administrative side in response to the upsurge of interest in design thinking. The Shiga prefectural administration's Policy Lab. Shiga is one example. This experiment commenced in 2017 as a voluntary "off-the-job" project conducted by employees of the prefectural administration. Yukiko Sawada, one of the Policy Lab. Shiga team members, tells us that the project delineated four "personas" for Shiga Prefecture citizens as "portraits" of the residents of the region, which they termed "Mr. or Ms. XX." Ms. Sawada tells us that for the prefectural employees involved in the project, design thinking taking concrete portraits as its starting point provided an opportunity to return to the inherent goal of administration – the solution of problems for prefectural citizens.

Design Thinking is Innovation emerging from the Sites where Policy is Implemented

When we talk about "design," many people will probably think of surface decoration. Nevertheless, in an era awash in diverse products, no matter how functional a product is, it will only sell if it possesses a design that makes consumers want to use it. On the user side, people first become interested only when they can imagine themselves using the product. This is also true of policy.

How do we make policy "easier to use" for citizens? The design thinking methodology - listening to citizens' voices, testing of hypotheses and proposals by the administration in cooperation with citizens and businesses, and the ongoing quest for better policy on this basis – can not only encourage citizen participation, but also serve as a source of new ideas for the administration. A certain amount of resolve and determination may be necessary on the part of administrations that have heretofore searched for external "models," i.e. administrations that have sought "the right answer." However, the flexibility to skillfully incorporate innovations from the arena of policy implementation and the ability to take action that will be developed through the application of this method will be touchstones for administrations in the future.

It is my hope that design thinking will spread in Japan, and that we will see diverse policy lab experiments being implemented.

Professor Uno teaches in the Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo, and serves as NIRA's Executive Vice President. He took his Ph.D. (Law) from The University of Tokyo, and specializes in the history of political thought and political philosophy.

Embracing Social Complexity and Forming "Human-centered" Policy

Christian Bason
CEO, Danish Design Center (DDC)

"Design" is the process of creating 'new integrations of signs, things, actions and environments that address the concrete needs and values of human beings in diverse circumstances' (Buchanan, 1990). This concept has come to be widely adopted not only in manufacturing, but also in service and management innovation strategies. "Design thinking," which is built on this foundation, generally refers to methods, processes and means of creating "human-centered" products, services, solutions and experiences.

"Human-centered" policy formation places the emphasis on empathy with the people who are the focus of the policy. It differs from the conventional approach of collecting and analyzing data concerning the policy issue and rationally deriving solutions. The situations and lives of the people who will be affected by the policy are visually observed, and their stories are listened to and their interactions with things, services and systems are visualized; in some cases smells might even form part of the process. We use the five senses to understand the root causes of issues, enabling us to come closer to the people affected not on the basis of logic but rather of emotion. This is a qualitative research method known as "ethnographic research." In addition, design thinking involves the process of co-creation. It transcends the framework of administrative departments and involves related organizations, outside experts, and the citizens and companies that will be the end users of the policy in the creation of ideas. The formation of labs and platforms to allow this represents important infrastructure. In addition, we make use of "experimental" and "iterative" methods. Policies are created while subjecting the ideas that have been produced to repeated testing. When implementing the policies, extensive use is made of graphic and product prototyping methods to ensure that the policy is easy for everyone to understand.

There is an increasing movement to incorporate design thinking that offers the three elements of "human-centeredness," "co-creation," and "experimental/iterative approaches" in the public sector in order to realize innovation in policy and public services. This is particularly the case in the UK and Commonwealth countries, and also the Scandinavian countries, but it is a trend that is now spreading worldwide. In the background is the fact that rapid technological advances and globalization are producing changes in business, finance, the environment, and the transmission of information, and people's lifestyles. These are all intertwined, and as a result social issues are becoming more complex. Rather than resisting complexity, we should accept and embrace it. Public policy must incorporate and integrate diverse standpoints and different specializations. Precisely because of this, design thinking is positioned to make a significant contribution to policy making in the 21st century.

Dr. Bason is the CEO of the independent Danish state-funded design organization Danish Design Centre, which supports organizational development and the solution of management problems using design thinking. Prior to taking his present position, from 2007 to 2014 he was the Director of the Danish central government's innovation team MindLab. Dr. Bason holds a Ph.D. from Copenhagen Business School. He has held positions with a number of other organizations both within Denmark and in other countries, including the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, the European Union, and the World Economic Forum. He has also been active as a university lecturer, government advisor, and speaker throughout the world, and is the author of numerous books, including "Leading public design: Discovering human-centred governance" (Policy Press, 2017).

Take the Citizens' Perspective to create Policy that actually reaches Citizens

Hirokazu Okumura

Managing Director,
Open Governance Network

Design thinking in policymaking refers to a methodology applied in the policymaking process that enables the development of attractive policies in cooperation with potentially affected citizens, with "empathy" as the axis. In the UK, the former Cameron administration established a "policy lab," a policy team that would implement design thinking, in the Cabinet Office. Against the background of the government's financial difficulties, the policy lab was established as a response to the question of how to create effective policy that would reach citizens and the general public even with limited budgets. Underneath this concern, there was a reflection on the fact that conventional policies had been created from the perspective of administrative execution - in other words, from the perspective of public service providers - and issues had been considered based on past precedents and rules.

Design thinking, which emphasizes empathy, employs a method called ethnographic research in order to identify issues that cannot be grasped through data analysis alone. Using this method, policymakers seek the perspectives of the people who are the actual focus of the policy. To take homeless people as an example, policymakers would observe the actual status of the lives of the homeless by visiting them and spending time with them. While it may be difficult to extend this process to cohabitation, an image of the people who will be the focus of the policy is carefully drawn – "personas" are created – and this allows the policymakers to adopt their perspective. Taking child abuse as another example, using the design thinking approach, we would consider what parents, friends, schools, and such institutions as orphanages and children's welfare centers look like through the eyes of an abused child. Thus, thinking about how to make children most happy in the long run is an important approach in design thinking. It involves trying to completely "become" the recipient of the expected policy. What is required here is, through dialogue and observation, to draw out the underlying true feelings of the individuals which even they do not recognize.

Up to the present, I have been working in the area of open data, the disclosure of government data in order to encourage citizens to participate in the policymaking process, allowing the wisdom of the public to be reflected in policies. To ensure the continuation of this initiative, I am promoting the concept of open governance, which encourages citizens to play more active roles in the provision of public policy services in collaboration with the relevant governments, including local governments. I believe that it is necessary to introduce design thinking and consider policies that will actually reach the public. Government openness and design thinking have in common the fact that citizen participation is the key factor. I believe that it will first be necessary to create a "policy lab" of the type implemented in the United Kingdom, to conduct experiments, and to share the results with citizens and governments.

Former Visiting Professor Okumura works actively to promote open governance in Japan through research and the provision of advice. He possesses extensive knowledge of e-government in the west. He graduated from The University of Tokyo's College of Arts and Sciences in 1971, and entered the (then) Ministry of Trade and Industry. After leaving the Ministry, Visiting Professor Okumura held positions as a Consulting Fellow at the Research Institute of Trade & Industry (RIETI), a Visiting Professor at Kyoto University, a Specially-Appointed Professor at The University of Tokyo, a visiting researcher at Harvard University's Kennedy School, and a Visiting Professor at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Public Policy, taking his present position in 2019.

Attempting an Initiative is Thinking in Itself

Atsushi Hasegawa
President, Concent, Inc. /
Professor, Institute of
Innovation,
Musashino Art University

The contemporary era has been termed the era of VUCA. This is an acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. Massive changes are occurring, the future is unclear, problems are becoming increasingly complex, and we do not know the sure and correct responses to the situation – it is precisely in such an unpredictable era that we must take risks and prepare the groundwork for an uncertain future. However, Japan's government is unable to take risks.

When you do not know the correct response, taking the approach of first trying something is in fact an effective method. The intention is not to immediately achieve success, but rather to derive hypotheses that allow you to determine what might work. When something is tried, whether it works or not, hypotheses are derived from the process. This is termed "abduction" (hypothesis formation). This is the essential concept of design thinking; it could even be said that the process of making an attempt represents thinking in itself.

In design thinking, the essential point is whose perspective to adopt in attempting to think about solutions. For example, when a new product is created and the issue of how to achieve efficient mass production is considered, these considerations conventionally take place entirely on the supply side. By contrast, in the case of design thinking, what is required is to adopt the perspective of the consumer side, asking how it would be possible to create a more user-friendly product. To this end, at the product planning stage, we would leave behind the limitations of existing technologies and manufacturing methods and conduct repeated tests in order to give form to a product that users would consider to be of real value. The policy formation process is the same. Prior to the implementation of a new system, we would first formulate and test proposals designed to make the system a meaningful one for the citizens and businesses who represent the "users" of the policy. This differs from simply taking opinions. When opinions are taken, all we get are reactions based on projections from the status quo. What policy design involves is rather revising a proposal and formulating hypotheses based on people's reactions to the proposal, further testing the hypotheses, and ultimately proceeding to the stage of policy formulation and implementation.

Policy formation based on design thinking in this manner represents the creation of policy together with diverse actors, including citizens and businesses. In order for such initiatives to be successful, it is essential that citizens have sufficient trust in the government to allow repeated testing of proposals. The recognition that co-creation of policy by the government and citizens while engaging in repeated testing is a process that will open up a path to the future in an uncertain era must be shared by both sides.

Dr. Hasegawa is a leading figure in the field of information architecture, which represents "design of understanding." He founded Concent, Inc. in 2002. The company works in the area of UX design for corporate websites and web services. Dr. Hasegawa cultivates the social application of design and the building of social systems through design, and recently has both researched and led design education for Japanese companies and administrations. He's been a professor at Musashino Art University since 2019. He holds a Ph.D. from The University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Hasegawa is a representative of the Service Design Network Japan Chapter and the Vice President of the Human Centered Design Organization Japan.

Mechanisms are needed that will draw out Citizens' Values and Feelings

Kunitake Saso

CEO and Chief Strategic Designer, BIOTOPE Co., Ltd.

During Japan's era of high economic growth, the equation was "economic satisfaction = happiness." If numerical targets based on a macro perspective were quantitatively piled up and progress was made towards them, adequate outcomes could be expected. In the mature society of today's Japan, however, the question is how to realize happiness for diverse individuals. The design thinking approach, which considers what should be done taking individuals' ways of life as the starting point for these considerations, is an effective one in seeking to realize a value such as "happiness," which is difficult to express in figures, through policy. This necessitates the functioning of a method that would render qualitative information such as the subjective values and lifestyle choices of citizens visible, and allow the formation of policy on this basis. At present, however, the Japanese government possesses no such mechanisms. The issue for the government is to determine how it will be possible to visualize and actualize the vital, future-directed feelings of citizens with particular views regarding how they want things to be.

I am conducting a citizen participation project that seeks to create a future vision for the Tama River basin area. Tokyu Corporation is mounting the project, and the company is working together with residents, companies and local administrations in the area in order to envision the next generation of town planning. The themes that we are focusing on include how the specific characteristics of the Tama River basin area can be utilized in work and play, and what types of lifestyles we can propose that make use of the richness of nature in the area. The experience of this project has shown that it is extremely difficult for the government to gain access to the feelings of citizens regarding what they want done, and to give those feelings form. If the administration does directly take opinions from certain citizens, there may be an appearance of arbitrariness in the selection of those particular citizens, or there may be issues of neutrality and fairness –Why were those particular people's opinions considered? The only approach available at present to avoid these problems is to assemble quantitative data representing a conglomeration of needs.

It is essential that we establish mechanisms enabling administrations to make adequate use of the values and feelings of citizens in decision making. It would also be valuable to make the ways in which citizens make their opinions known more visible. Northern European nations and the UK have created neutral organizations such as policy labs. Organizations of this type conduct workshops, and create opportunities to connect citizens, businesses and local administrations and practice design thinking. The approach these organizations adopt of identifying policy issues and exchanging ideas that will be employed in policy proposals should provide a useful reference for Japan.

Mr. Saso's company BIOTOPE Co., Ltd. proposes service design projects and methods of creating a culture of innovation to diverse companies, from large corporations to long-established businesses with extensive histories. Mr. Saso established BIOTOPE (a "co-creative strategic design firm") after gaining experience in marketing a number of hit products for P&G and launching a new business creation program for Sony Corporation. He is a graduate of The University of Tokyo's Faculty of Law, and completed a Master's degree in design at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

How do We create Policy based on Empathy with the Citizens of the Prefecture?

Yukiko Sawada

Policy Lab. Shiga
(Shiga Prefecture)

In Shiga Prefecture, volunteers from among prefectural administration staff began conducting a policy research project that incorporated design thinking in 2017. This project was called Policy Lab. Shiga, and was conducted as an "off-the-job" trial project. We sought to consider the question of how we could create policy that had as its starting point the real attitudes of the citizens, and that was based on a deep understanding of and empathy with them. We conducted numerous workshops and discussion meetings together with prefectural citizens. Specifically, we conducted qualitative surveys for more than half a year in which we interviewed prefectural citizens and conducted observations around themes such as "Finding a place for young people" and "Migration from outside the prefecture." This allowed us to identify issues. Based on this knowledge, we delineated an image of the citizens of the prefecture through the creation of personas for four citizens.

What was highlighted to us by this was the discontent among the prefecture's young people, and the confusion that new migrants felt over their sense of distance from the community. We therefore held what we called a "Future Ideathon" to attempt to resolve the issues faced by our personas. We considered solutions together with people with diverse perspectives (differing ages, professions, etc.) and mutually came up with ideas. During that process, we sought to find answers to the question "Who do we want to make happy, and how?" We compiled what we learned from this activity into policy proposals, and presented them to the Governor of Shiga Prefecture in 2018. We then held an exchange of opinions with the Governor.

In design thinking, we do not understand the citizens of the prefecture as a single collective; we return to the aim of realizing solutions to problems that suit the worldview of each individual. Most tasks for employees of the administration come from the top, and we have to do them. Against this background, a design thinking perspective that opens out from a concrete "Mr. or Ms. XX" represents an effective approach to the creation of policy from the bottom up.

If we advise local administrations to introduce design thinking in earnest, a few issues should be pointed out. The implementation of budgets in units of single fiscal years leaves no margin for the formulation of policy after repeated testing, an important process within design thinking. Additionally, if the administration is one in which the organizational culture often associated with the administrative sector exists – by which I mean slavish following of precedent, forced consumption of the budget, etc. – then improvements need to be made. Understanding of design thinking among members of staff and the ability to manage the entire organization are also necessary. The ultimate goal is to realize a "flat administration" that transcends the boundaries between organizations in order to jointly create policy that originates in the real feelings of the citizens of the prefecture. My aim is to change, step by step, the way that the Shiga Prefecture administration performs its tasks and the awareness of its staff members, and to realize a Shiga Prefecture that is loved by its citizens.

Ms. Sawada is a member of staff of the Shiga Prefecture administration, currently attached to the prefecture's roads department. Policy Lab. Shiga (PLS) was launched in 2017, in response to remarks made by Shiga Governor Taizo Mikazuki that referred to the effectiveness of design thinking in the face of a decline in the prefecture's population and the need for change in its administration. Ms. Sawada was one of 11 members of the PLS team responsible for making policy proposals to the Governor. Following the submission of these proposals, PLS was dissolved and efforts such as the Taskforce to examine the Realization of 100 Years of Active and Engaged Life, which utilizes design thinking, were commenced as prefectural government organizations. Ms. Sawada continues to be vigorously active in the area, for example as a lecturer in design thinking policy training.