

A conversation with Jocelyn Wyatt on June 14, 2013

Participants

- Jocelyn Wyatt — Co-Lead and Executive Director, IDEO.org
- Cari Tuna — Co-Founder, Good Ventures
- Eliza Scheffler — Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: This set of notes gives an overview of the major points made by Jocelyn Wyatt.

Summary

Jocelyn Wyatt is the Co-Lead and Executive Director of IDEO.org, a design consultancy for the social sector. GiveWell and Good Ventures spoke with Jocelyn Wyatt to learn about IDEO.org, including how it works with foundations, sources projects and evaluates impact. IDEO.org's project to improve sanitation services in Ghana was discussed in detail.

Background on IDEO.org

Founding

IDEO.org was created by IDEO, a global design and innovation consultancy founded about 30 years ago. IDEO was first involved in product and technology design, through which it developed a process for understanding peoples' needs and designing for those needs. It later applied this process to services as well (e.g. financial services, health care and emergency rooms, hotels and hospitality services).

IDEO.org was founded 2 years ago, as a way for IDEO to apply design thinking for social impact and to move beyond the private sector. The IDEO business model did not conform well to work in the social sector (IDEO's services were often too expensive for non-profits, and IDEO's staff did not have experience in the developing world or in working with foundations). In order to move into the social sector, IDEO created a new model with IDEO.org that was able to decrease costs substantially and incorporate staff with experience in development and poverty alleviation.

Mission and vision

IDEO.org's mission is to apply human-centered design to poverty alleviation. It's work ranges broadly, and includes products (e.g., clean cook-stoves, solar energy), services (e.g., financial services to increase savings among the global poor), and systems (e.g., water delivery business, health care, addressing the gap between education and job readiness in the U.S.).

IDEO.org also aims to build leaders for the social sector who understand and can incorporate design thinking. Towards this goal, it runs a fellowship that employs 8 people to work on IDEO.org projects for one year. A challenge of hosting a new class of fellows every year is that the organization loses a lot of institutional knowledge when they leave. IDEO.org does hire some of the fellows on to its design team for permanent employment, but the majority pursue other jobs in the social sector. IDEO.org also promotes design thinking among social practitioners by developing online learning tools to teach the tools of design.

IDEO.org's higher-level vision is to increase innovation in the social sector. It hopes to influence organizations to design products, services, and systems that are responsive to peoples' needs and to constantly iterate on these based on feedback from recipients/users.

One of the challenges to achieving this vision is that grants given on a long time scale can lock people into doing something in one way, which stunts innovation.

How IDEO.org sources projects

IDEO.org has a business development team that is in charge of sourcing projects. Sometimes nonprofits will come to IDEO.org for design support, but they do not have funding to pay for it. In these cases, if IDEO.org wants to take on the project, it will work with the nonprofit to write proposals and apply for grant funding. Other cases begin with the donor – foundations will approach IDEO.org at their initial brainstorming stage or further into a project when they want design support.

How IDEO.org works with foundations

Foundations provide IDEO.org with general operating support and also fund specific projects that IDEO.org works on. For example, the Bezos Foundation is funding a communication campaign targeting low-income parents about how it is important to engage with children in many ways, beyond just reading to them (which is the more common message). In this project, IDEO.org was involved in developing the vision for the campaign, before it was brought to an ad agency.

IDEO.org also serves as a sub-contractor on some projects, receiving foundation grant funding indirectly through the contracting organization. For example, IDEO.org was hired as a sub-contractor on another sanitation project run by WSUP that was funded by the Gates Foundation.

IDEO.org has worked with the Hewlett Foundation as well, mainly on reproductive health and family planning. Hewlett initially approached IDEO.org because it wanted to bring design thinking into its portfolio, but did not have the skills on its own staff. IDEO.org chose to work with Hewlett grantee Marie Stopes International (MSI), a large provider of family planning products, to redesign their family planning services. MSI runs clinics that provide women with long lasting birth

control, abortion services, condoms, and general information about pregnancy and STD prevention. The challenge MSI was facing in one of its clinics in Zambia was that these services were being under-utilized. IDEO.org came in to figure out what women's needs were around birth control and what could be done in the centers to encourage increased utilization of the services. This involved reviewing a range of potential problems, including poor branding and marketing, unwelcoming architectural design, incorrect pricing of products and services, a need for more female community health workers, and even that health centers were stationary when it may have been more effective for them to be mobile. In the end, IDEO.org decided to re-design the inside of the clinic, re-brand it, and implement a new procedure for welcoming in clients.

IDEO.org's main input in the research process is interviews with people in the target market, site visits to do observations, reading case studies, and interviewing experts. A single project can involve many different types of staff, including interaction designers, developers, architects, branding experts, and graphic designers. First, staff is drawn from IDEO.org's permanent staff, but some positions may also be filled by IDEO employees, and independent contractors.

IDEO.org has a 20 person staff, 8 of whom are fellows. Generally, projects are 8-12 weeks long, though there are exceptions, like the project with MSI, which was 24 weeks long with 1 year of follow-up support.

IDEO.org's Innovation Fund

IDEO.org's Innovation Fund was created by the Wasserman Foundation, which is contributing \$1 million over 4 years to allow IDEO.org to provide pro bono design support to nonprofit organizations. Projects supported through the Innovation Fund include consulting on a project in Kenya to increase retention of customers for a new toilet model, and providing strategic support for World Health Partners regarding data collection, analysis, and reporting.

At first, projects for the Innovation Fund were solicited through an application process. IDEO.org reached out to foundations like Skoll and the Omidyar Network for nominations of organizations. An IDEO.org committee then reviewed the organizations that applied. This process required a lot of time and effort, and staff felt that it was not yielding the most innovative proposals. IDEO.org's new approach is more intuition-based; staff pursue organizations that they come across at conferences or in TED Talks, for example, if the organizations seem promising.

Criteria for choosing projects

A major criterion for choosing projects is finding the problems or organizations that can most benefit from design. IDEO.org's goal is to work on projects where providing design support is *more* valuable than simply providing the equivalent value in funding for the project. The best opportunities are often working on

something that is broken or new, because that is where design work can be catalytic. An example of a "broken" project IDEO.org has worked on is a HeadStart program for families in Tulsa, Oklahoma. IDEO.org was brought in to address the low attendance in parent classes. A "new" project is one like a Unilever/WSUP sanitation company, which has extended services to a new geography and population (more on this below). IDEO.org is also working with an agricultural organization in Kenya that provides loans to farmers, but wants to expand to also provide information to farmers to help increase their livelihoods and facilitate farmer-to-farmer information sharing.

It is also important that IDEO.org's partner organizations are at the right point in their growth trajectory. Organizations of a few people that have not yet executed on their ideas are too early. Organizations with revenue of at least \$1 million are the right size. An organization's leader also has to be open to innovation and design.

IDEO.org project: Clean Team, sanitation in Ghana

How this project came about

In the past, IDEO.org did work in water that was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Several years ago, the Gates Foundation switched its focus from water to sanitation, which meant that IDEO.org's funding from Gates for water work ended. The Gates Foundation suggested that IDEO.org shift its focus towards sanitation, to align with Gates' new funding priorities.

IDEO.org's next step was to talk to everyone it had ever worked with who was involved in sanitation. This led to a conversation with a London-based organization called Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP). This conversation happened just before WSUP was to meet with Unilever about collaborating on a sanitation-related project. Unilever wanted to better understand emerging markets by conducting a product and service delivery project in a developing country. IDEO.org joined WSUP and Unilever to help create this sanitation project, which Ms. Wyatt noted as one of IDEO.org's most successful projects to date.

The question that motivated this project was "what are people's needs with regards to sanitation?" The project started in Ghana, where there were public toilets, but they were often dirty, expensive, and not always safe for women or accessible to the elderly. To address this problem, IDEO.org decided to design a toilet that would not require digging a pit latrine, which people could have in their homes. IDEO.org also helped design the maintenance system for these toilets: an operator coming 3x/week to service the toilets. There was a clear demand for this type of product and service, for which no solutions were in place.

How the project works: logistics

Unilever created a separate Ghanaian company called Clean Team to provide the products and services in Ghana. The board members of this company are made up of staff of Unilever and WSUP. If Clean Team becomes a profitable enterprise, the board will determine where profits go.

This project came out of Unilever's R&D department, which saw it as a way to accomplish multiple goals:

1. To learn about emerging markets with on-the-ground experience.
2. To explore how Unilever could grow beyond product delivery to incorporate service delivery as well.
3. To build a new distribution channel for its products that would access new customers.
4. To create market demand for its products.

Clean Team has about 7-8 Ghanaian staff members in country who carry out the implementation. Right now, leadership decisions are still made at the board level, but this will have to shift to the Ghanaian staff over time.

IDEO.org works with Unilever and WSUP in designing products and services, securing grant funding, and promoting the project.

Funding

Unilever provided the first investment of \$1 m to cover all initial costs of the project, including IDEO.org's involvement. Unilever's motivation for this project was to learn about emerging markets; it has not yet made a profit on the business. The next stage of funding, which is coming from DFID, will cover a scale-up to 1,000 toilets. After this stage of funding and scale up, Clean Team is expected to be a fully functional enterprise that can cover its own costs.

Plans for expansion

Clean Team's growth has been conservative so far, despite requests to expand to other countries, because it really wants to get the model right. Before entering a new place, there are logistical considerations, such as where waste will be dumped and how waste buckets will be washed. If the waste does not get dumped properly, that could be worse for health and sanitation than if the toilets had never existed. In Ghana, the waste is dumped in a local treatment facility. Unilever is investing in a new treatment facility. Ideally, waste would be converted into fertilizer or energy.

Design process

The design process for the toilets began with interviews of people in the target market about their sanitation habits and what they would most like to have. From this it was decided that an in-home toilet was the best product. IDEO.org then created 5 different prototypes by adapting off-the-shelf models. Three of each

prototype was sent to Ghana, where they were given to households that agreed to be part of a pilot. The pilot participants were asked to record on a sheet how they used the toilet and were interviewed about their experience at the end of the pilot period.

This pilot provided useful data on peoples' preferences. It was learned that people tended to not like having a water flush, and did like larger, more substantial toilets to smaller ones. People also did not mind having a urine division in the toilet, which helps reduce the amount of waste that needs to be treated by siphoning off urine from solid waste.

How success and failure are assessed

One way that IDEO.org assesses success for the project is based on whether people sign up for the service and continue with it. After 6 months, only 3 of the first 100 families dropped out of the program, which was a very good response. There is also a waitlist for people who want the toilets. This is the first form of assessment – asking whether a product is desirable and whether people will be willing to pay for it. The next stage should look at the health and behavior impacts, such as if there are fewer cases of diarrhea, and whether people are going to school and work more.

Another way of assessing successes and failures is based on feedback from customers. There is also a customer service representative who works for Clean Team. When this person collects payments from customer households, s/he also checks in with them to get feedback. IDEO.org adapts the toilet model regularly, based on feedback. Iteration is an important principle of design. For example, at first, payments were collected weekly because it was assumed that paying in small increments would be ideal. However, customers said that the frequent payments were annoying, so Clean Team changed its model to collect payments monthly. Another example is that toilets were initially emptied and serviced twice per week, but this changed to three times per week because the odor and cleanliness became a problem. A third example is that customers requested for Clean Team representatives to bring cleaning products for purchase when they visited customer households. Unilever was totally on board with this, because it enabled them to get their products to potential new markets.

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