

Hi, I'm Mauro Porcini. PepsiCo's chief design officer. Join me for our new series, where we dive into the minds of the greatest innovators of our time with the goal of finding what drives them in their professional journey and in their personal life. Trying to uncover the universal truths that unite anyone attempting to have a meaningful impact in the world. This is In Your Shoes.

Design is to give meaning to people. What would you love people to love. I'm quoting from my guest today is a professor of leadership and innovation at the Stockholm School of Economics where he co-directs The Garden, Center for Design and Leadership. He's also a faculty member at Harvard business school, where he teaches integrated design and is a co-founder of Leading Lab, the laboratory of leadership, designing innovation at the school of management or Polytechnico of Milan. His research focuses on how to create innovation loved by people, both the users and the creators. He explores how leaders and organizations generate radically new visions and make these visions become real.

Is the author of two iconic books on the topic. Overcrowded: Designing Meaningful Products in a World Awash with Ideas and Design-Driven Innovation. A book that has been translated in eight different languages. His research on the management of design and design clusters has been awarded with the Compasso D'oro, the most prestigious design award in Italy.

And he has issued more than 150 articles on topics, including developing products on each of the time, innovating through design and the novel the power of criticism. He's in the hall of fame of the journal of product innovation management, and has served as advisor to executives and senior managers, and a variety of manufacturing service firms, including Ferrari, Ducati, P and G, Unilever, Gucci, Samsung, IBM, J and J, Phillips, 3m and many others.

Roberto Verganti, welcome to In Your Shoes. Roberto it's such a pleasure to have you with us today.

Chow Mauro, can I say Charo just to be a little more family style? It's a real pleasure for me to be here with you and everyone that is connected.

You say family style, actually we know each other very, very well, right. I, I actually met you when I was still a student in Polytechnico of Milano. We talk about that about this probably. You don't even remember when that happened. There were like 450 students there in front of you, you are the teacher of, I think, microeconomics or economics at the fourth year. And you have been my teacher for just few

months. And then I left and I went to Dublin to study for one year with an exchange program. So I didn't have the pleasure to be completely fully your student, but, but then over the years we met again and then we became friends and we've been doing so many things together, right?

Yes, actually you met me really at the beginning of, of my, uh, my path into the design world,

Actually, that's I think a very interesting way to start this conversation. You are not a designer. You are, you, you, your background is in business. You work in the business world, but in the meantime, you are one of the most renowned and iconic I dare to say, ambassador of design in the world and ambassador of design in the business world. You have been helping all of us in so many different ways through your consultancy and mostly through your books, there's Engineering Innovation, Overcrowded. How did it happen that a business person became so passionate about design and then a vocal ambassador of this discipline in the world.

Uh, first of all, maybe there's a secret behind that, that I'm an engineer. So, and then, and then the reality is too, I never practiced engineering in reality. As soon as I graduated, I started to work in the business school of Politecnico.

And what happened is that at the beginning, I was doing research, but given my background in engineering, I was doing research on the management of innovation. And at that time innovation meant technology basically. So I went to Harvard in 1997. 1998 to do research on the, how companies developed software in a company like Netscape. I mean, if I only say the name, it's unbelievable, it's long time ago. But you know, they started the studies movement about a giant development, interactive software development, all this kind of thing. Then I came back to Italy. And one thing that I learned in Harvard is that it's very difficult to do research, if you don't have good material in front of you. I mean, it's very easy to do research in software if you are in Boston. But if you're, Italy at that time, there was not much software. That Italy was well known for design. So at that time, Politecnico di Milano created the first ever graduate school of design in Italy. People don't know that people know that Italy is well-known for design, but, uh, there was no graduate school of design in Italy in the 1997, 1998 Where you were basically.

Yeah, 94' was the first year I joined, 93'. 94' was the first year I joined in 94, 95 was the second year.

So, and this season I came the fourth year. So in 98, when I came back to, I really met you there. And, um, and because many

of the famous designers from Italy there, they graduated in architecture, not nothing that's through design. So I came there and, uh, when they asked someone from the business school is there, anyone who wants to go and teach to the design school, it was business administration for designers. And I was coming back and saying, you know, why not? I mean, at least that's the space where Italy is excelling. So maybe there's something new to learn and there everything started. So just because I was searching for some new space, what top in term of industry relationship with, with, with the context? Uh, although I have to confess one day, I came back to my notebooks when I was a child. You know, when you're a child, you're right. This little, you know, essays, what do you want to do when you were big, those and that? Then I discovered them when I was eight, I wrote, I want to become a designer. Oh, who is the person who designs cars.

That was a design, is the person who design cars. Okay. By the way, by the way, this is interesting because still today, many adults, not just kids think that designers are that, they design cars, that design clothing, they work on the aesthetic of some products. There is not a more profound understanding of what a designer is. So what is a designer for you, now a few years later after you brought that, you know, th th th the people that design cars, what is for Roberto Verganti a designer today?

Well, of course, as always, there are many, many kinds of designers, but to me, the quintessential designer is someone who always ask the question, does it makes sense? Uh, whenever you design something, uh, I mean, I can make it legal. I mean, I'm an, I come from engineering. So, so in, in that time, engineering was five years of studies and any five-year studies, uh, you know, classic engineering student isn't class, a professor comes, it gave you a big, difficult problem to solve, and you solve it, actually the most difficult ir is, the cooler it is. And I, in five years, I never, saw any student rise in his hand and say, "professor, that problem doesn't make sense." Never. Because if ever you do it, is not the professors that answer. It is your colleagues that tells you, you say it doesn't make sense because you don't know how to solve it.

So there is, I mean, as an engineer, you're proud of, you know, we are Marines, you know, we solve problems and, and we're proud of... Well in, in the design school, the first problem, and you, you said, it's hold on a second. Professor, that problem doesn't make sense. And of course the engineers take jokes of you. We say, yeah, because you don't know how to

solve it, but, but that's a designer. I mean, does it really makes sense? And I'm, sometimes I'm sad to realize that in the recent years, this, this perspective design has been a little lost. We increasingly see designers are great, great, great problem solvers. Then, then finding different when engineer's become increasingly difficult. I mean designers are are, people that really try to make sense of the problems in front of them.

I mean, you use these words sense, and then you often use somehow a synonym of sense that is meaning, right? Your design driven innovation is a meaningful innovation, is a meaning driven innovation. Can you elaborate a little bit on this idea of meaning that I think is one of the most profound ideas that you have in developing this agreement, innovation first, your first book, and then in Overcrowded later?

Yeah. It is really this capability of, uh, reframing the problem in front of you in a way that is more meaningful. And I mean, nowadays it's a very popular word and they kind of bounce everyone use meaningful. But in this case, I really meant that everything that is in front of us, every object, every service, every experience, uh, has a meaning. I mean, I'm not inventing this. There is a lot of research about this one, probably one of the most famous book is The Meaning of Things by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi who was famous for psychology, and he wrote the book about the meaning of things. Whenever we do things, we are humans. We give meaning to the things we do, but this meaning over time changes, uh, because several reasons, society changes because, uh, there are new technological opportunities. I mean, I was laughing the other day, was watching, uh, uh, TV with a member of the family.

And, and, and, uh, I mean, the television has been, uh, the meaning of a TV has been the enemy of the family for a long time. And nowadays it's finally we can all sit in front of the TV instead of everyone looking at his own screen. So it's changed. The meaning of a television has changed significantly. It's, is, is, is a social. Instead of unsocial, it's a social device. So society changes and the meaning of things change. And, and, uh, and most of the time, if we realize this meaning is enabled by a choice from, from a designer, from someone who was in as imagined a new possibility, which is not, and this is again coming back to what we said before. The real designer is not the problem solver, it's someone who imagines a future, which is not the problem-solved future, but it's a design future, something that it doesn't start from solving the problem of the past. It's not past dependant.

It's imagining things that nowadays, they don't even exist. You basically design the problem. You don't solve it. You design it in a way that is more meaningful.

And you don't start from the past, what do you think about the role of research, consumer research, testing on, on design driven innovation? In a world where you need to even redefine the problem, design the problem and then define the meaning of the solution to the problem. Can you test that? Is it possible?

Uh, uh, uh, unfortunately this is not a really easy, I mean, in our research and in, also in the project we do with organizations now, since it's more than 15 years, uh, the we're, realizing we had discovered that whenever you want to change the meaning of thinking, you want to change direction. Uh, uh, customers are really, really unlikely to help you, uh, um, you're not the only one discovering these probably the most famous theories is from Clayton Christensen, the Dilemma of innovators, the more you're close to user the more that they really trapped you into the path of the past. I mean, the user is using something that didn't exist in the past. So, so you can, I mean, getting close to the user is fantastic to improve things, to do things increasingly better in the same direction, but to change direction, users are really, really poor because they have expertise of the past, not of the future.

And also because this kind of innovation, you know, understanding what it makes sense. You cannot put it on a scale. If you're designing a car, you want this car to break in a shorter space, you can measure it. But if you ask yourself, that really makes sense to have a car that is standing there 99% of his time. And that's kind of the reflection. You kind of measure that it's, it's, uh, it's, it's, it's given meaning to things since making them. And so there's no one who can ever tell you what is right, what is wrong? It really comes from you. Uh, and if it doesn't come from you, or the first challenge you have in innovation process, you stop because you're waiting for an external event to tell you whether to continue. So I Mauro, I always use one sentence that you, you, you told me once, uh, and I borrow, this sentence because it's, you once told me, of course you listens to customer. I mean, you have to listen, but don't believe them. Which means to me, you need to make sense of things. Sometime you lead. I mean, you listen always, but then you say by mistake and you are the expert we have as designers, we have responsibilities not to give people what they want, but what is more meaningful to them. So that that's...

So now connected to these, you've been working with so many major corporations. And when you do, when you take your users,

your consumers, people with you, and you do incremental innovation on a product or a brand, the scale is not that difficult to grow considerably the revenue of, of that business, that brand, because you already start from a big scale, big scale consumers want that incremental innovation and you grow. When you do something more disruptive it's more difficult because especially the beginning, the early adopters are really, you know, as more percentage of the people that eventually are interested on your, or understand your, your disruptive innovation. And so it's difficult to go escape rapidly with that kind of innovation. Uh, it takes time.

So what's your point of view on, on this, because that difficulty combined with a need of time for people to get used to that more disruptive idea is what often become a major roadblock for big companies to do that kind of disruptive innovation, to pass from a laptop computer, to an iPad, to an iPhone as Apple did, for instance, successfully in the past.

No it's true. And that's that reason why it's really an innovation that is inside out. I mean, it's, it's come from really, from your understanding of what it could be more meaningful to people. Usually I use the sense that what would you love people to love is what you love, but not for yourself first. What do you love? What you love people to love? So other people is your vision of this. People will love this, and you love the idea that people will love this, because that idea is what keeps you going on. Uh, and it's true. I mean, that's, that's the class, you know, in innovation come from user, it's tend to, I mean, you can grow, but then at a given point, you're saturated because you have been squeezing out everything you could squeeze out. So you always need to take some bigger steps, big, big, and path.

And this path is something that, uh, is a longer journey. There will be roadblocks. And the only way to continue is that you believe people will love it. And it's not that you are your deaf. I mean, you, you listen in this sense by, uh, but then you elaborate and you adjust. And, and there is this internal drive that we in business in business schools, we are scared about that. Uh, uh, although we slowly I have to say, and we can talk about this, if you like, uh, actually, why don't we talk about this coming back to our introduction. When I came in class in the class, you were sitting in that class in, in more than 20 years ago. Uh, and at that time as a professor from a business school, I was the enemy in the design school. I mean, I can imagine, you know, the thought in those 450 students, Oh my God, this there's this professor now, you know, talk about business and business is dirty, you know, uh,

especially in, in design school where there was this, you know, anti-establishment, you know, really want to change the world. And this guy comedy teaches us how to make money. And sometimes I'm sad because in this moment, in the world of business, there's an increasing will to do things for the good. Now to do things well, too, we say to bring purpose into organization so that the business community is moving closer to the creation of the good of meaning for people. And instead, the design community has started to talk the language of business, you know, design thinking, the processes, the tools and innovation, and don't be scared. You know, there is a process. And so it's almost that there'd been a switch and the world of design, because of course the great thing is that we want to make design more palatable to, to, to business people. We started told the language and that sometime I tell to people in the end, don't worry. I I'm quite good at speaking business language, be a designer because what business people believe is not in mini business person, it's a real design. And that kind of critical attitude is exactly what the business person needs in this moment, maybe 20 years ago, no, but now business people is searching for that critical attitude and a little bit of risk and a little bit of vision.

I completely agree. Um, sometimes you see designers that lose themselves and as you say, become mini business person often, you know, an average mediocre business person, because it's not your background, but you lose the value. I think what is important though, is to keep, to preserve somehow the ability to talk the business language so that you become a partner, you become what they call a co-conspirator instead of a tool. You know, even if you are a human being, but you know, somebody to be leveraged and use by a different community. I think this, you know, peer to peer relation between business and design bring into the table, different perspectives, but also using a language that is accessible to each other that is understandable by the two communities is really key, but you're right. We are witnessing so many designers losing their essence of designer and becoming less valuable to organizations that don't need people that are not that kind of.

Yeah. And I mean, 20 years ago, it makes sense. Of course it made sense because the two worlds were so far from each other that you needed to do these steps, but nowadays they are even, they're becoming so clear that the inertia they're crossing each other the other way around. So in a way, my feeling is that many business people nowadays really, really understand, and actually they're searching for a more meaningful

way of doing business. Everyone talks about purpose. The reason why they need the designer nowadays is that they don't know how to make it happen. So in a way, forgive me if I say it, but it's the practical side of things that they miss. It's not that the visionary, because that that's, they're there, the two worlds are getting closer, but then there this fantastic power of design that they are not only sense makers, they are doers and, and, uh, and especially they work on the real core of everybody's issue, which is products, services, experiences. It's the real stuff. They work on the real stuff, Going back to innovation and also your books and your theories. Um, often you use a graph where on the vertical axis, you have performance slash technology and on the horizontal you have meaning. And sometimes you call it language as well, but meaning and performance, and you have example, and then you have incremental performance change. And then disruptive or radical performance change and the same for meaning and different examples of increment, uh, performance driven, innovation incremental, or more or less incremental and meaning remaining innovation more or less incremental. Can you talk a little bit about that? Because I think is a very, especially through examples is a very powerful way to explain the world, what you mean with meet, meaning, meaning driven innovation or meaningful innovation. And especially I think the magic of when you mix performance and meaning where the magic happens.

Yeah, no, it's a, it's a very good point I can use. I mean, maybe a very simple example that that is a little old, but sometimes simple example are more powerful, uh, in the world of game consoles. I mean, the classic meaning the example I use is always the example of the innovation to use by the Nintendo Wii, which is a product everyone knows. So, uh, before the Nintendo Wii, the meaning of a game console is, you know, I play with a game console. Why that's the meaning of the why? Because I want to enter into, into another world into virtual reality. I can, I can be Cristiano Ronaldo. I can be a soldier. I die, but I don't die. So it's you really entering into a virtual space. It being someone else, was the meaning of traditional game consoles, and then you can make incremental change.

You know, you can make the change. I mean, you know, there is a way to play in like this. And then you can put another button there because you know, there's a finger that is still free, but in the meaning that your ability is what matters. You can make radical change in the same direction. You know, you can have when, when the PlayStation three and Xbox 360



came out in the market that they had chip inside, which was designed by IBM, which way forward it terms of performance, really a breakthrough in terms of speed. So you can see all the graphic because you're interested in the input to this virtual world. And you want this virtual world, to be precise. You want to see the drop of the rain and the but the Nintendo Wii came. And they changed the meaning.

They say, okay, you know what? Uh, we, we played by moving and playing by moving means. It doesn't, it doesn't care. You become someone else, you play your self, you don't become "" and play tennis. You play tennis yourself. And it's the way you move the way you socialize. Actually, one, one more thing there is wrong because it's about socializing. So if you make it difficult, people is great for the great player, but it's not great to socialize with others. So the meaning from competition to socialize is from being someone has to be in yourself and get your body better is radical change of meaning. Okay? So, so we have this, you know, you can have radical changes in performance, same direction, 10 times better in terms of speed and graphic, but the meaning is the same. Or you can change the meaning of things and reinvent yourself. And we know that in that case, that is an example that I use also, because this is the impact was suddenly. So people got it rapidly and it sold twice as much as the other two.

Now let's say that I am the CEO of a company or a business leader, and I lead a brand the product portfolio, and then understand what you're talking about. I understand that I need to innovate with meaning in mind. I understand also how to do it, I read your books. I know the process, the tools, and then you see people applying those theories or companies applying those theories and being very successful. And then you see other companies apply exactly the same theories and not being successful. I, these are not the theories of Roberto, in general, you, you, you understand the same thinking you apply. You're successful. You apply. You're not successful. I've been seeing this for many years, you know, in my own experience of serving other companies. And I started to think, okay, why, why the same tools and different results? And then the answer becomes very obvious at a certain point is all about the people behind those tools, the questions that they have asked and the way they observe their reality, you say, earlier at listening to consumers, not believing them means that you need to interpret and interpretation is driven by your way of thinking your intuition, your empathy, your sharpness of thinking.

So people are important. Then often companies and books and

academies talk so much about processes and tools. So they don't spend enough time to define what is the idea of innovation. So, so how, now important it is in your mind, uh, the person behind those processes and tools and what is that? The ideal innovator, what are the characteristics or traits of the innovator?

First of all, I, I, I cannot agree more. Uh, did you say something to say about the theories. Design is not a theory? Maybe design thinking, that kind of process, is a theory, but design is not a theory. Design is a practice. I mean, you can have good design, but you also can have bad design- as you can have good management and bad management. So, so, uh, that's the kind of narrative that I think, and I hope the community will use soon. It's not that design is good. Design is design. I mean, it's not that you never hear any managers going around and say, you know what? Management is good. No, no, actually we do accept the opposite. We explicitly say management can be bad, but it can also be good because that's the real way that you save the discipline because otherwise every time you fail, but that is not true.

The management is not good. Yeah, exactly. Management can also be bad. And you need to learn how to turn bad management into good management. So we need to start saying there's bad design and good design. And that's the reason why the people who makes design becomes very important because having, even if everyone used the same tools and there is good ways of use, there's not a good ways of use. There's great people. And, and, and, and, and more inspired and, and people is probably better at doing other kinds of things. And, and so, uh, to the, that I'm doing a project important project with a large corporation in this moment, uh, in Japan. Uh, unfortunately I cannot, I cannot disclose the name, but I came, you know, over the years, given the, when you work with cooperation, they keep asking me, what is the process? What are the steps?

And also design driven innovation, changing meaning you can find the tools. And in Overcrowded I described, but they say, you know, a professor, why don't we simply make a meeting, eight people from the leadership team, you sit with us, it was sitting on Zoom. And we just talk, on the meaning of our product. Of course. And I was so touched. And so finally, you know, this was, I mean, he said, if I will tell you the name, you will never believe it. Uh, it was the most fantastic two hours of meeting in which in two hours, we really deflected, deeply talking about the meaning of things. It's like when you're in front of the fire and you talk about the meaning of life, you're the leader of the process. Talk about the meaning

of life and you need to talk and be inspired of course, and be good people. So, uh, what are the characteristics of, of these people is grading, at least in design driven innovation in this change of new meaning. I would say first they are reflective, uh, which is a little different than, than the classic fast, uh, execution.

Hold on a second. You can always do it, but then you stop and you reflect. And there's a fantastic theory about this by famous professor from, actually comes from the eighties, Donald Schön about the reflective practitioner. I mean, a designer is a reflective practitioner. You, you do a drawing or you do a prototype, but then you stop and you reflect the work you've been doing. And that's the real design moment. Does it make sense what I did? To reflect is self critical, self critical, and then curious, but curious is not playful. It's really curious. Whenever you see something that it doesn't match, what you see is not curiosity like a child, let me search. And now this is painful why this guy can make this thing. And I don't see. And that's the curiosity start because you, while in business school, we always teach students to be good in judgment, you know, should I choose A or B the reflective practitioner, like a real designer.

So you see A you see B, you see A you see B, not hold on a second. Why I see this one, but it's person see and finally you find that you saw the paradox and you find C which, you know, brings together these two things. That's the real innovation. It's not that you throw a thousand of ideas. It's this distinction that, that is very important. If you want to bring design at the leadership level, because you will, the point is really there when you're on a leadership level.

There are tension and you come there and you don't say, this is better than this one, not, wow, you see this, I see that. How can we bring this other one of us is stupid, but it's not. Or we seem to see two sides of the same thing. How can we bring them together? It requires a lot of creativity.

You mentioned the word leadership. And, and obviously there's a word very important for PepsiCo for any company. Um, because at the end of the day, those leaders are the one driving the company's in the right direction. You recently started an initiative. You are in Stockholm right now, and you are working on the connection between design and leadership. Can, can you tell us more about this initiative?

Yes. Uh, that's funny because in this moment it was snowing outside. There's the sun, but it's snowing, uh, so you have really miss Stockholm. Uh, but, um, what I'm doing here, I created a new center of the house of innovation, of the

Stockholm of School of Economics. And given this is the house of innovation I said, okay, I will call the center of The Garden. Because every house has a garden so, I would take it out. The garden that, and the garden is the center for design and leadership. So division is, uh, that I believe. And we come back to this idea of, I didn't believe that people will love it. Uh, I believe that design can bring great contribution to this hunger of business where a new way of looking at leadership. There is this hunger. A lot of people talk about powerful students coming up from business schools start to say, I don't want just to make money.

Of course, there's nothing wrong about that, but I want to create a more meaningful world. And, and you see from my students, but they don't have the tools. They don't have, They didn't have the, they have the will and the wish. So it's a great moment because design, first of all, as, as we said before, it is already there. It's about the meaning of things. So that's we already there. So, so we, we are aligned in this one. We don't even need to convince the managers they're there already there. The second thing is that we have a, and sorry if I put myself into the design community and but the second thing we have is it's the capability to make things real. I mean, I've been doing a research study a few months ago, looking at the part of the statement. You know, many companies, now they have a powerful statement.

We want to change the world. So we did, uh, we did a study in the world of, uh, finance. Oh, they know, yeah, the banks, powerful statement. And then we did the conference and we showed three purpose statements, one from the bank, one from a supermarket and one from a fashion company. And we ask people, can you guess, what is the finance company here? And there were all of the, you know, can, you can imagine our purpose was to make the world a better place and safer and whatever it is, and eventually everyone pick the supermarket.

So there are so high level that, that there is always, there is meaningless. So say the power of design is to really bring power as a fin down, down to world, down to product and services, because that's the reason why organizations do exist. They exist because they do product and services. So when you really reflect on the meaning of the product of this can of, of, of Pepsi, you have in front of you, of this pen here. And I mean, it means I'm trying to be a little more modern than that because I'm using that pen instead of using a piece of paper. But when you really get close to that, uh, then you're transferring your high level will of changing the word into really changing the world because you change the world through these things. So

design as this short circuit between the, the will and the hand, which is really unique. So I always tell to designers, don't lose your capability of doing, because this is what makes the real difference. And we can talk about aesthetics as well, if you like,

But I want to, but yeah, we'll talk about that. Let's remember. Um, but you talked about purpose a lot and obviously talking about purpose immediately come to mind, uh, the events of the past couple of years in this picture, that past year. First of all, the attention on, on gender, the me too movement and black life matter that a more recent. And unfortunately, especially here in the United States, all these hate against Asia and then, you know, the Chinese virus and something that is really so difficult to understand. And yet, so common in human nature, we see that we need to make an effort to remember there are so many billions of people that are good human beings, and we need to fight somehow all that hate with kindness and we love and with empathy. But,. And with design.

So the question wasn't going to there. So going back to companies and design, you know, companies are, many companies, including PepsiCo, where I work are taking a position or making a statement that they have a very clear point of view on, on those matters. Diversity in general, you know, the purpose of the company. So our design can help in all of these. You mentioned partially, but talking literally about the theme of diversity and, how design can help in this area?

I think that design is probably one of the practice that can help most in this case. Uh, and I, I take it from a very peculiar perspective, but we have been doing a couple of projects on gen Z recently in different spaces. And gen Z is quite unique and is the generation that will come next.

So, and it's not only that they will come in 20 years because you know, the last generation was the oldest people now look past. So it's not any more like in the past, they were looking at the elders, it's the elders who are looking at the youngest people. So they would really shape society soon and for the young generations. I mean, if you take gender or skin or, or any kind of diversity in the past, we know that there was one way of being like one, it was, if you're a male, you, you need to be a male.

And if you're, if you're, if you work in the skin, you need to be white. And, and, and they found that people, you know, work in this skin and, and, uh, and if your hair, it needs to be blonde, the, all these kinds of things, but gen Z is totally different and its different than very peculiar way, because it's

not that these problems don't matter anymore. It's not that the skin of your skin, because that could have been a direction, the color of your skin, your gender, color of your hair, what you wear. It doesn't matter. Oh, if it's, you know, rich, poor, old, young, old, no, it doesn't matter. We are all the same. Now it still matter a lot like before, but everyone can be a gender, a skin, to dress, whatever they like. And people is increasingly becoming a designer of their life. I mean, you can see it in gender.

I mean, it it's, uh, it's not what the, when your identity cares is what you feel. And if I feel I want to be gay, I'm gay. And, but if tomorrow I want to change again, because I feel different. I change again and not even static. And it's totally fine, but when I'm there, I really want to be there. So diversity is not doesn't mean that these differences don't matter. Everything matters a lot. What is your color of your skin? And again, your gender, but you can be whatever you like, which means you can, this is a moment which people, the gen Z want to create their identities. And that's the space of design. Imagine what, how can you change the word? If you enable people to create their identity as a designer, I give you the tools to become who you want to become. It's there. This is the moment which we can as design community. We can have an impact that is amazing, giving people, the capability to create their identity. You need a lot of creativity to do that.

That's a very interesting idea. And I think also with the social media platforms, then you have a further amplification of any self expression that you can imagine for yourself. Is that putting already, I think they're talking about tools now in a very positive way, without the right tools, who also guide people in this journey to define yourself. That is so, by the way, is part of the pursuit of happiness is, is a very important component of the Maslow pyramid is literally, you know, a way to reach your happiness once you fulfill the basic needs. So it's not a nice to have, is at the very base of social happiness in our entire society. Um, you mentioned aesthetic before we, I changed topic. Um, I have a couple of questions about aesthetic, but before anything else, what did you want to say about aesthetic? You mentioned it and... Well, uh, I still remember, Mauro you invited me to an exhibition at the Sonoma, the modular, the design firm in Milan a few years ago, you had Mprobably was one of the first and second year you were in Pepsi, I think. And I came in and I was immersed into a world of colors that I never saw before. And you were anticipating what's happening

now, actually, because I start to see the same colors in movies and cartoons nowadays. So you were five or six years ahead of the time. And, and, and this idea of being immersed into a new space, you know, I was really feeling elevated, you know, I was feeling good. And with this idea that designers are problem solvers. We, we, we, we take the humanity out of life and, and, and aesthetic is very important because aesthetic is given meaning through immersion.

I mean, we, we, don't only give meaning to things by solving equations and functionalities, uh, aesthetic is functionality aesthetic is a statement. It's, it's much more powerful because you don't need to explain anything. Is there, you, you, you can change much more of the world through the power of the design language that you use than by the functionalities that you deliver. It's really the idea that you don't keep the distance between you and the object, or the experiences aesthetic is immersion. And, and, and we have the duty as designer to be very carefully not using that kind of capability because we, we, we don't. The only way to change the world and not to change the mind of people is to change their heart. And you don't change the heart through functionalities. You change the heart through aesthetics.

I love it so much. At the end of the day, aesthetic is at the surface of the creation of meaning. I mean, and, and that's why it all starts with people and ends with people. You need to deeply deeply understand that people are going to use and enjoy your products, and then understanding what kind of meaning their search, needs and wants, together functionality and emotionality together. And then aesthetic is the four very, very important lever to create, to reach that kind of goal. And you're so right. I, in so many conversations about processes and strategies, sometimes we lose the, the, the recognition, the importance of of aesthetic in all of these. And by the way, aesthetic is very qualitative. Somehow. I mean, there is a quantitative component, very objective, but there is also a very, very very subjective component of aesthetic. Uh, there is not, you can, you may have multiple, good aesthetic solution to the same kind of problem. And that's where once again, the, full, the intuition, the sensitivity, eh, of, of the designer, the entrepreneur, the innovator, the person driving the project becomes extremely, extremely important.

What are the kinds of, sorry, go ahead.

Talking about, um, per post talking about, uh, society is evolving and changing. And then we are talking from the platform of PepsiCo, a company, uh, that produces packaging, that goes, you know, in the houses and in the life of billions of people

around the world. For us, sustainability obviously is a very important topic. And we have a variety of different initiatives to make our portfolio as sustainable as possible. And what's your point of view on sustainability? Our sustainability is changing the society and what is the role of design to create a more sustainable world, but not just in isolation. There world the role of design in connection with products and companies and brands on one side, people are there because people will also play a role. They, you know, we need to understand what are the behaviors of people. how they use their products, how they recycle and reuse their products. And then their all, eventually there is also the role of the media, the government, all the third parties that they're observing or enabling certain behaviors. So what's your point of view on design sustainability and the world we live in?

Uh, this is very, very interesting by the way, then, then I would, I think this then I go back to the, to the vision that I'm having here in Stockholm, because it's connected to this. Uh,

There are, there are,

Are, first of all, one of the problems with user centered design is that unfortunately it's not sustainable. What does it mean? That one thing is to solve the problem of a user or to give meaning to users, but not always, what is good for a user is good for society at large, not only what is good for a user is good for the environment. So the perspective being on the user center is a it little bit dangerous. And that, that is why we need new perspectives. And there is a, here in Stockholm, there is a Dunhill is the design strategy of the Vinnova, which is the state agency for innovation, and they use this name, citizen center design.

And we just, I, it's funny to even, because imagine you're designing a car, and, but one thing is to design the car for the user. I think that was driving that, but the same user is that person who is a citizen, and the next day will cross this street. And when it crosses the street, it doesn't want to be hurt by the car. And then the next day it's taking his children to school. And when he's working in streets, he doesn't want to breathe the gas, but it is, what's the way to say, it's not, we don't want to miss the, the peculiarity of design that is really people center. But moving from being user centered to be citizen center is the way to say that the same person interact with this experience as a citizen from many, many different ways.

If you only look at the user, it's just, okay, you can make



the user happy, but probably would buy the product. But the same user, the next day is a citizen is looking at that product used by someone else and created a disaster. So, so I find it very inspiring. The second perspective that I, that I have about this of course is a perspective of meaning. And basically I classify two kinds of meaning. When you talk about sustainability, one is sustainability as a differentiator and example Patagonia. Okay? So in that case, sustainability is what makes the difference. They have where they I call sustainability as a gift, what does it mean? You buy your product and you don't buy it because it's sustainable, but that is not okay. But then technically is sustainable. Now is a gift. So you open this product, start to use, and then you discover that, wow, it is supposed to sustainable it's great.

So you don't, you don't, you don't buy this because it's more sustainable than the others, but you discover this as a gift. And this gift come from whom, from the designer who has been thinking about this without asking me to make compromise. And this is very important because the first perspective design is a difference here to. Bring the trade-off to the user. Okay. I buy this thing. I would like to buy it more fashionable product, but I buy this because it's more sustainable. It's not as cool. So I need to make a trade-off between cool and sustainable. Okay. I like to have Gucci, but I go on it because, so the design has been transferring the trade off to me and I need to make a compromise. Design sustainability as a gift instead is, wow, this is such a cool product. Let me see. It's also sustainable. So who has been taking care of the trade-off the designer? And I think that, that, eh, th the, the short cut of only thinking about sustainability as something that people care for, no, it's the designer who needs to care for it. Thank you for giving me this gift which I can still at my cool stuff, but is sustainable? That's the gift.

I look, I profoundly profound agree with this idea, and this should be always the goal. Too many times, we design products, services, experience, packaging, thinking about the compromise you need to take. I think so that's a message for us designers, innovators, brands. I think also though, there is a message for the, for the society and the consumer, sometime that's not possible because maybe today with the technologies we have, the materials that we have that compromise the, avoiding the compromise may cost too much to the consumer, or make it, make the product unfeasible for the company. And so there is I think a second message that I think is extremely important today and especially the media need to

carry the message, is that there is in this journey towards the perfect product, towards the product where there is not compromised anymore, but is a journey.

And each player needs to play a role. If we want to advance the sustainability agenda as fast as possible. So there is space for a product that maybe you need to reuse or to recycle, even though the ideal product maybe is the one that is dissolve itself in the environment or that doesn't pollute at all. And is still perfect from a functional and aesthetic standpoint. So this idea of the journey hand in hand, it is not one against the other. Consumers, with companies, with governments, with media all together with the same agenda to change the world, I think is a very important message. Because if we have antagonism and people pointing the finger at companies not creating the perfect solution, then you work in the companies are like, gosh, I'm trying to do everything I can, but there are these constraints. And yeah, you know, that maybe technology will help in a few years and maybe, you know, there is research going on in these other fields. So I think is a tension for us. I think your message is very powerful. We need to find the ideal product for people that they will buy. No matter if it's sustainable, I mean, sustainability is, wow, he's also sustainability. I like how you say it, but in the meantime, while we get there, let's work together on, on what are some of the trade-offs we need to take as a society to change things as rapidly as possible.

And I like, I like this idea of the journey and the journey together and where everyone takes care of the end or their own, uh, responsibility. So the customer can take on the little bit of, of their trade off and the company a little bit that the trade off and everyone put a little bit there. And that's the way, I mean, it's, we, there's no magic wand.

Look, we could go on and on and on for hours. So as usual, we always have these long conversations. Most of the time offline, um, two questions just to wrap up and close. One is, is there any message you want to leave us with? And second, I know, you know, in backstage I saw a guitar close to you. It's almost becoming a tradition. Fabio, Novembre played a little piece for us in Italian, in one of the last episodes. You want to play something for us, Italian, English, whatever you want quickly, like 20 seconds, just to say goodbye.

Uh, I will try, uh, first, uh, maybe the message. I think the message is what we have been discussing today, an old, single topic. Uh, I didn't prepare this, but it came out now. It is the summary of our conversation. Maybe it's, let's try to be nice as designers, as deeply designers as we can. Uh, there

is, there is an increasing need of real design. I mean, don't try to become business design designer or business model, do your job because we understand the community management of business needs that incredibly. So go deeply in your profession. Don't be scare if you're a designer, it's not because you're, you're not a failed business student, if you are in design because you love that. So don't, don't be shy and be as designer as you can. I think that that that's whatever that means for you. Uh, that's I think is the message because we need real designers.

Um, by the way, the thing that I wanted to mention it, what I'm doing here in Stockholm what you're trying to do. We are trying to design because also professors are designed to be designed program. And this moment we are designing a leadership program, which is really inspired by design. So it's a new way to is a new leadership development program entirely inspired by design. Uh, and maybe now in, we are in the concept development phase. Uh, so maybe one day we'll have a chance to talk to you a little more deeply about this, but, uh, uh, it is really the, the perspective. We believe that there is a mindset of design that can happen either way. If people want to find more information about this where they should go.

Into our mind because they still, they just contact me.

And, and, and that's, that's, uh, that's a, it would be probably launching in January, 2022,

I guess, at, by that time, if anybody's listening to us in, in that timeframe, Google Roberto Verganti, what is the leadership Stockholm? Probably, you find something.

They come to my website, Verganti.com and they find my address. But what I'm searching for in this moment, what I searched for is a few very inspired pioneer, who wants to co-design this with us. So that's what I'm searching for this month. So not many would be quite more, probably 10 participant, 11, not, not. So we want to it very, very, very unique, uh, and in this moment we are pulling together this 10 participant in one, we're starting January, 2022 but we want to design the initiative together and a real co-design. So that's definitely a good trend.

Play a song.

Okay Let me see here, what we have. Okay.

Okay. Let's try it. I will not sing because that's really not mine.

Music plays.

I stopped here for those who were really angry. And I, this is Genesis 1973.

Thank you, thank you Roberto for this last gift. We were talking about gifts. Thank you for this last gifts and for the gift of this conversation today.

Great design, by the way, that's another good example of design, a guitar. Mauro. Thank you. It's been a great, it's always a pleasure. I hope that that people is listening. I've been having fun as always have been learning a lot from you.

Inspiring questions and hope we can do these again, maybe in front of a, in front of some wine.

Soon, soon. Thank you. Chao.

Design is to give.