

Intention-setting with Reflexivity and Introspection: a Driving Force of More Ethical Design Practice

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Abstract *In today's world, ethical considerations are often made retrospectively: faulty and biased designs promote outdated ideas and contribute to socioeconomic, racial, and gender-based discrimination. Ultimately, they are unconsciously fostering unjust power dynamics.*

At Aalborg University, our Master's thesis in Service Systems Design dives into the core of design practice and how it might become more conscious and ethical for a more sustainable future.

It tackles questions such as:

How can designers adopt a more intentional and responsible approach?

How can a virtue-ethics-driven praxis that utilises introspection, reflexivity, and debiasing techniques contribute to a more consciously driven design process?

Our approach to answering these questions was led by the recognition that, in the design world, ethics are often perceived as overwhelming and confusing. What is more, the design process is saturated by the methods and tools available to be utilised in the design process claiming to support a more ethical process and output. Furthermore, the reduction of ethics in design to methods and tools, we argue, can fog up identifying harmful design decisions; their implementation needs to be more systematic and overarching the whole design process, with emphasis on the early phase, where often ethical principles are formed.

As service designers, we took action by inviting experts and practitioners in the field to discuss personal and professional responsibility and how ethics are practiced to address pressing issues of our time. With the support of their insights, we developed the "Intention-Setting Workshop," utilising existing tools and placing them in a system to support ethical decision-making from the beginning of the design process. This way, we aim to support designers in becoming more intentional about the ethics of their practice. The workshop supports personal bias identification, with an emphasis on reflexive and introspective practices that contribute to a virtue ethics-driven mindset, which, we believe, is a path towards an ethical and more-than-human-centred design practice. Through this output, we hope to encourage designers to have a systematic understanding of applying tools and methods in their practice and ultimately to start tracing and uncovering their biases to lead more ethically driven processes that promote praxis rooted in reflexivity, introspection, and debiasing.

