Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION Review

Editor's Note

Technology for the People

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TWO ISSUES AGO, *Stanford Social Innovation Review* published the cover story "How We Achieve a Multiracial Democracy," by PolicyLink founder Angela Glover Blackwell. In the article she called on Americans to build a society that fulfills the principles that the United States was founded on—liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness—for people of all races, not just for white people.

In this issue, we publish a new call to action. In the cover story, "Reimagining Our High-Tech World," Omidyar Network CEO Mike Kubzansky argues that the public needs to assert control over digital technology and make sure that it is developed and implemented in ways that meet the interests of the many, not simply the private interests of the few.

Semiconductors, software, computers, smartphones, the internet and web, data mining, social media, artificial intelligence, and more—the US government funded much of the basic research underlying our digital world. But the implementation of these technologies, and the financial value that was created from them, have been controlled by private interests. The government has largely stayed on the sidelines, until now.

Today, there is growing support for the public to assert control over these technologies and the companies that control them. It started with concerns over digital privacy and the private use of personal data, gained strength with calls for control over social media, and is reaching a crescendo with concerns over the unbridled use of AI in what seems to be nearly all parts of our lives.

Concern over AI has become so broad that many of the people who played an important role in creating and commercializing digital technology and AI are now among those most loudly calling for government control. Among them is Kubzansky. Interestingly, Omidyar Network was created and funded by Pierre and Pam Omidyar, who made their billions through digital technology powerhouse eBay, which Pierre founded. And Omidyar Network itself has, according to Kubzansky, invested more than $750 million in technology start-ups.

Until now, most of the efforts to exert control over technology have been focused on a single issue, such as social media or algorithms. Kubzansky argues that this approach no longer suffices: Digital technology has become so pervasive in our lives that we need to approach it as a system, rather than as discrete technologies. He holds that the digital system should serve the public interest, with much more intentional governance of technology in its broadest terms, including culture, norms, mindsets, institutions, ethics, and participation.

That is, of course, a big undertaking, but as a way to begin, Kubzansky asks us to consider five fundamental questions: What underlying assumptions, mindsets, and ideas must change to create a digital technology system that uplifts society? How can inclusive participation drive a stronger digital technology system? How can ethics and transparency enhance digital technology's ability to serve society? How can policy guide a reimagined digital technology system? What financial models will incentivize a healthy digital technology system? Kubzansky addresses these questions in the article, but his answers are just the start of the conversation we need to all have. — ERIC NEE

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