Essential Decision a Minimal Approach to Design

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Abstract

In a materially rich modern world, how does one apply the core minimalist concept that possessing and consuming less is actually more and use this as a guide to design products and change our lives? Minimalism is an art and design style that follows the maxim 'less is more' and has, in recent times, evolved and integrated into lifestyles. The author was curious how, in this age of material abundance, was it possible to possess a few items and how to choose items one needs. The author began with understanding the essence of minimalism by reading widely on this topic and following the works of luminary Japanese designers and a well-known Japanese housewife Maria Kondō and her approach to organizing possessions at home. The author then applied this understanding to her room to get a more in-depth insight into how these principles work in life. After that, a few participants were recruited for this study. They were required to send pictures of their desks and engage in a conversation via chatting apps to provide insights into how they organize their possessions. The author found that a modular system that is highly adaptable to suit multiple users and their needs to organize their possessions but still retaining the overall concept of minimalism does indeed help to improve their lives.

Keywords: *Minimalism, minimalist design, minimalist lifestyle, redesign*
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1. Introduction

From the 1920s to the 1980s, the trend of design has gradually shown a diversified development trend. In this so-called post-modern period, a new design style, minimalism, has emerged in Western society. The design style of minimalism presents a kind of simple, intuitive, pure function but does not break the characteristic of complete and productive. The method of minimalism inherits the development of modernism and abstractionism in the 20th century and becomes its indispensable design feature with simple forms, rich in connotation and ultimate function. In the 1970s, due to the energy crisis caused by the excessive development of Western society, people gradually began to realize the dangerous adverse effects brought by excessive consumption of resources and the rapid expansion of material desires. People began to reflect that, under such a background, the minimalist design style was generated and developed. At the same time, more and more people are adopting a minimalist approach.

Japanese Minimalist Sasaki (2017a), in his book Goodbye, Things: On Minimalist Living, describes the emergence of minimalism and how it can change one's life through disengagement.

However, not everyone wants to be a minimalist, and most are not, but they also pursue its essential philosophy in life. They agree with the idea and try to learn to abandon the sundries, but in the end, they still own most of the items. For the author, it is not a simple exploration of the definition of minimalism and the analysis of typical works to illustrate its design style. Many designers blindly pursue this, often ignoring the essential meaning of products.

From the author's point of view, the 'less' in the maxim 'less is more,' refers to the cleanliness and simplicity of the living environment and the focus of people's thinking while 'more' refers to all the benefits obtained through the reduction of goods and improving the quality of life. This study focuses on capturing the essence of these concepts by analyzing the minimalist design and the practical experience of room arrangement to truly understand the hidden meaning and abstract thinking concept of minimalism. Inspired by the concepts outlined in Maria Kondō's book, The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up, the author applied them to organizing her room and the desk and found that even if most of the items were discarded, the work desk would become messy as long as it was in use (Kondō, 2014). In this study, the

author will try and use a structured process of design methods learned in the master's program and apply them to solve the problems of cluttered desks, with the hope of improving the quality of life, by influencing a positive change in people's lives.

1.1 Minimalist Design

Fukasawa and Morrison (2007), a well-known Japanese product designer, founded a minimalist brand ± 0 and served as a design consultant for a renowned Japanese company called MUJI. Fukasawa describes the core of his design thinking approach as *'Without Thought.'* He explains that with a simple example: As per him, when we walk on the ground, we perceive and feel the ground under each step which depends on quite a bit on our subconscious, which does not mean that there is no active thinking, but maybe there is no conscious perception of this act of walking, but our bodies such as hands and feet have recognized the environment and respond.

For the design of products under the minimalist style, the intuitive and straightforward geometric form is not the only way to express the shape of objects. Different products have different material properties, which, to some extent, soften the cold, severe and impersonal sensory experience of the geometric form and directly awaken people's sensory perception.

In the year 2004, Kenya Hara, a world-class Japanese designer, curated an exhibition with the theme "HAPTIC," which is the awakening of the five senses. The word haptic means the feeling of touch or touch of comfort. He uses this word as the name of the exhibition and wants to think about the attitude of cognition based on the perceptual experience of touch to people. No matter what design you work on, the creative process deals with shapes, colors, materials, and textures. Our eyes, nose, mouth, ears, and skin play different sensory roles, and human senses are keen, free, and bold. Therefore, it requires that the designer in the design of the work should be very concerned about the work to bring a variety of sensory experiences (Kenya, 2004).
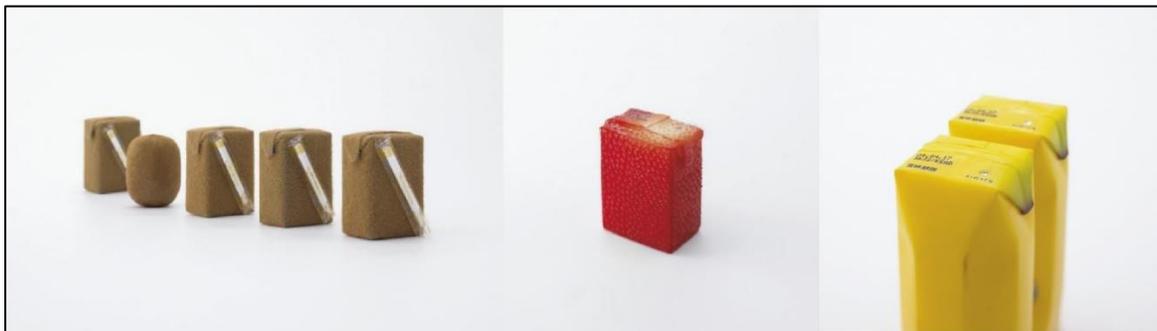

Figure 1 Naoto Fukasawa's Juice Skin design from the HAPTIC exhibition (Fukasawa & Morrison, 2007)

From the exhibition of Fukasawa's work, "Juice Skin," you can get a secure experience of natural texture and tension. The design form and product function of "Juice Skin" is clear at a glance. The strawberry juice box vividly reflects the particles and unevenness on the surface of the strawberry, and the design of the kiwi is the same. From this, we can see that the designer has grasped the essential material attributes of the product in the design. The product is exposed to us in a way that is closest to the original characteristics of the material. In this way, even if there is no text or image on the product, we can understand the properties and functions of the product at a glance. It is a design constructed in the mind of the recipient; this is not just a simple external imitation, but also that it awakens people's perception.

Fukasawa and Morrison (2007) collected 204 everyday items, to find a solution to the extraordinary design examples collected in the Super Normal - Sensations of the Ordinary. Fukasawa explains the design concept of 'Super Normal' when asked why it was "Super." In his opinion, "if our sense of the ordinary belongs to the field of no design, then the incredible attempt will weaken all bold and overly absurd behaviours, and arrogant statements will be deemed to be beyond design." He thinks 'Normal' is the way things are. 'A Super Normal' is something that is designed to be Normal, as we know it to be primitive,

although it does not have any personality whatsoever.

Fukasawa and Morrison's elaboration on the design concept of 'Super Normal' fully reflects the typical style of minimalist design and advocates the concept of 'no design' in design. Extreme is the source of design, and the original appearance of things is the essence of what we are pursuing. According to him, this is a 'natural' reasonable and sincere expression.

Braungart and McDonough (2019) an architect and a chemist, set out from their professional practice to illustrate their redesigned sustainable development model in the book Cradle to Cradle by describing the growing patterns of cherries for readers. It used to shout out the slogan "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle," but it did not change the design at the source. Moreover, the existing strategies of energy conservation and recycling can only prolong or degrade the life cycle of products and reduce energy consumption, but the resources will eventually run out. This book learns from nature; all things are nutrients, can return to nature. Using the concept of "nutrient management", product outcomes are carefully conceived from the product design stage so that substances can be recycled continuously. This concept is put forward, has a higher-level request to the design and the high-level request to the designer.

The Japanese brand Muji launched notebooks and notepads made of non-bleach paper, which is fundamentally different from the paper products we buy in traditional stationery stores. They are naturally a light tan in color and are easy to recycle. Muji extended its application to packaging, labels and many other materials. Simplifying the production process significantly reduces the costs, and from an environmental point of view, this significantly reduces pollution. With a unique aesthetic value, these products are in sharp contrast to traditional, overproduced commodities, which are widely available all over the world. Especially in today's society, a large number of trees and vegetation are cut down, and excessive production leads to excessive waste, environmental pollution, and energy shortage. People can no longer ignore the challenges facing the environment.

2.2 Minimalist Life

The minimalist lifestyle is about living with only the things you need. Minimalists are free from the desire to buy and accumulate more. Instead, they find happiness in relationships and experiences.

Japanese minimalist Sasaki (2017b) wrote a book on how to become a minimalist, Goodbye, Things: On Minimalist Living, which describes the emergence of minimalists and how to abandon items to change your life. At the beginning of the book, he wrote that "less is happiness." In the author's opinion, this is another explanation of the minimalist design "less even more" applied in life. Sasaki (2017c) stated in the book that one of the causes of minimalism is the flood of information and matter. He believed that 'functionality' is the criterion for judging whether an item is needed.

Most items in modern times do not win with function, but humans use them for other purposes. To continue to have these non-essentials and keep them functional, it takes a lot of effort and time to manage. In other words, everyone is working hard for some non-essentials. Unconsciously, the objects become the masters of people. A Japanese housewife Kondō (2014) gave an efficient method on how to discard items and how to organize them after discarding them. "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up" has obvious explanations and ideas from how to discard items on how to organize them. She insisted that one rule is to leave items that make your heart-moving, she only did two things, throwing things away and organizing them, and throwing out the trash was the first thing.

The author summarized some of her methods in the book. First of all, before discarding items, you should first think about what your ideal life is like, and then start to sort the items and sort them according to the sort order of clothes, books, documents, small items, and souvenirs. When selecting an item, you must touch it with your hand, perceive the item, and leave the item that hearts you. This approach coincides with the concept of minimalism designed without thought. When sorting, we also start sorting according to this order, but before sorting, we must clear three principles: first, set the location of all items in the home, and items must have a fixed storage place; second, storage should be simplified to the limit; third, do not scatter the storage place, such as living alone, it is more convenient to organize. If you live with other people, there should be a specific storage space for everyone. From person to object: only through continuous sorting and screening can we reflect on and improve our past behaviour, and we can

continuously understand our values and outlook on life, and we can have a more confident and more precise plan for the future. We are constantly breaking away, slowly reaching the state of integration of knowledge and action. Several benefits are obtained; you will have more spaces for your essential things, gain more freedom, pay more attention to health and hobbies and less attention to material wealth, have a peace of mind, get more happiness, feel happier, be able to find happiness from enjoying a slow-paced life, have less fear of failure, be more confident, and so on. It is called changing your life through organization.

2. Objectives
The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of the related practical problem, and thereby improve lifestyle and quality of life through a modular system of organizer that is highly customizable and is flexible enough to accommodate multiple users and their needs.

3. Methods
Develop a framework for the study by reviewing concepts behind minimalism and based on the understanding immerse oneself in the process of applying those concepts in the real context of one's room. Next, the interview of participants recruited for this study and conducted visual research of their desks to get an insight into how others organize their possessions. Participants come from different fields of work, so the items that appear on the table are somewhat different. For example, a friend of the author who works in a soy sauce company, soy sauce on the worktable is a very reasonable thing. Based on these findings, the multiple variations of modular designs are presented.

4. Results and Discussion
The author interviewed twenty-eight people. In the first interview, the author asked them to take pictures of their desks and send back to the author (Figure 2 below). These photos were analyzed for insights that would trigger a creative solution for what is normally a very messy desk in everybody's home. A typical desk is equipped with a computer, a laptop or desktop computer. It can be seen that the computer is an indispensable item for people now. Since the computer and its accessories already occupy a large space on the desk, as long as you place some other items on the desktop, it will always tend to get cluttered.

Figure 2 Photographs of desktops collected from participants

The author analyzed the photos to list all objects found in these photos (Table 1) to show how many objects all these participants owned more clearly. Through collating the data and observing the pictures, the author found that although the 28 people interviewed belong to the same age group, they have different jobs, genders, and identities, so their desktops do not have typical office supplies like the desktops of ordinary office workers. However, most desktops still consist of a computer with a bunch of folders and some random clutter on the desktop. Through observation of different photos and combining with the occupation of the picture owner, the things they put on the desk are all related to work. For example, there is a soy sauce in the data. The owner of the soy sauce is actually an office worker in a soy sauce company. There is also the person who puts the bowl on the table. This person is a school teacher. She takes her food to school to eat so she will put the bowl on the table. Moreover, people are so busy at work that the change they get from their purchases is thrown on the table. However, according to the data, pens are most frequently put on the desk, followed by regular office supplies. The computer and its accessories are all fixed, which is not the cause of desktop clutter.

Table 1 The list of the number of items owned by 28 people

Item	Number	Item	Number
Computer	23	Key	3
Mouse	18	Measuring rule	2
Mouse mat	10	Printer	2
Keyboard	8	USB	2
Pen	158	Coin	2
Book	44	Watch	2
Cup	26	Bag	2
Document	17	Clamp	2
Cable & earphone	17	Bluetooth speaker	1
Tissue paper	12	Clip	1
Food & medicine	12	Sponge	1
Power strip	9	Toothbrush	1
Cosmetic	9	Lighter	1
Phone	8	Nail clipper	1
Glasses	8	Photo frame	1
Scissor & cutter	8	Hat	1
Post-it note	7	Bowl	1
Plants	5	Spoon	1
Comb	5	Screw-driver	1
Calendar	4	Rag	1
Mirror	4	Ashtray	1
Toy	4	Kettle	1
Tape	4	Cotton swab	1
Table lamp	4	Shaver	1
Stapler	3	Soy sauce	1
Calculator	3	Gift box	1
		Router	1

The author believes that the observation of the pictures can be very intuitive to get a peek into other people's desktops and help in designing solutions that are suitable for most users and not just the designer. Therefore, in the second interview, the author asked people about their demands for desktop items and based on other responses, the following table was created (Table 2 below). The author believes that the things people think of must be the necessities in people's hearts. Knowing what customers think is the most important thing for designers.

We can clearly see from the table that each of the 28 interviewees has different needs for desktop items, but all of them agree that pens are the most needed items. The second is regular office supplies. At the same time, a small number of people chose items not closely related to office supplies, such as coins, food and medicines.

Table 2 The list of the 28 people choose what they need

Item	Number of people	Item	Number of people
Pen	28	Measuring rule	8
Cup	25	Clamp	7
Phone	25	Bag	5
USB	25	Key	5
Tissue paper	24	Calendar	4
Book	23	Tape	4
Document	21	Bluetooth speaker	9
Post-it note	19	Mirror	7
Earphone	19	Cosmetic	6
Power strip	18	Pinter	6
Table lamp	17	Watch	6
Glasses	16	Comb	5
Stapler	16	Food & medicine	4
Calculator	9	Coin	3
Scissor & cutter	8	Toy	3
Plants	8		

Concerning those findings, many items clutter on the desktop. It suggests that different people have different needs for the desktop. If you want to set their fixed position for each item, this is not the best method. Each person's needs are different. The author cannot set what each person must possess or what items must be placed in what position. The data from the two interviews provide the author with some design directions. The author needs to make a design that can be used by people in different work fields.

In order to support the distinct, the author has designed a grid system (Figure 3) composed of four different modules, which can be freely assembled among them, and different combinations can be made according to different needs of people.

Figure 3 The grid system

People who regard painting as a profession, use this grid system to place their painting tools (Figure 4), which can be freely matched and keep the desktop neat and tidy, leaving the most significant space for a painting to create. The businessman put office supplies on the grid system to keep their desktops clean (Figure 5).

Figure 4 Place painting tools   **Figure 5** Place office items

Most of our items stored on the table are pen holders and file shelves made of acrylic materials, which lack beauty and versatility.

A right design solution would be to solve problems but not define specific places or functions for each item. Due to the rapid progress of the times, many products have replaced. For example, people used to use MP3 players to listen to songs and use calculators to calculate, but nowadays, they replaced by mobile phones. Therefore, when we consider modular combinations, we need to consider the combination of multiple functions, considering that people now work a lot in specific areas, hence portability as a function can be considered.

This grid design, using recycled materials, have different colors to choose from, and people can select and match according to their decoration style or personal preference (Figure 6).
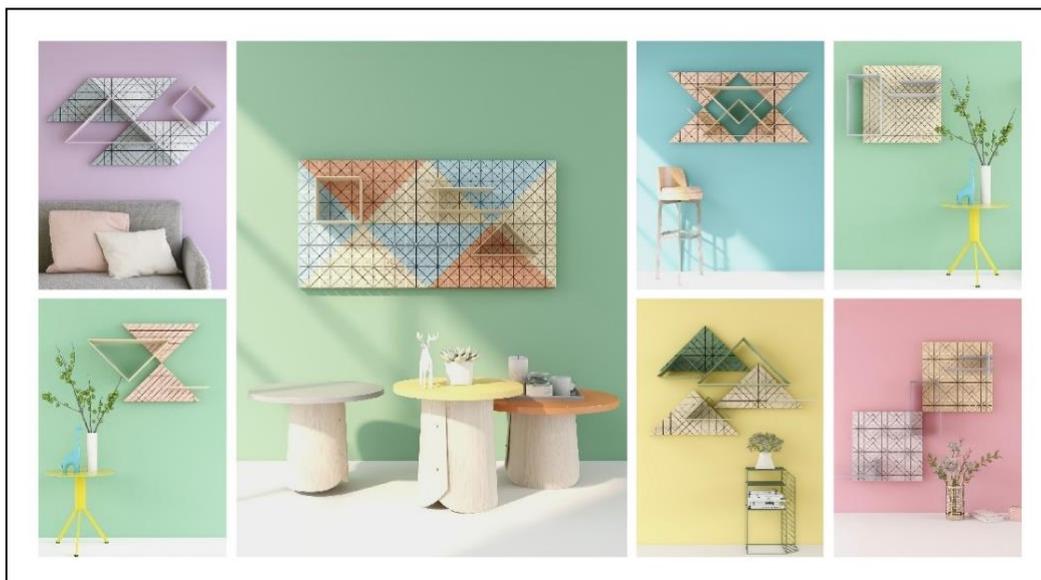

Figure 6 Different color combinations that are possible

This system design consists of four parts; the basic backboard, frame, panel, and pin. The frame includes triangle frames and quadrilateral frames of different sizes (Figure 7). Only the backboard of the whole system needs to be fixed on the wall with screws, which the slot of the backboard is 25-mm deep, and the embedded module can be stable without falling. The material used is Richlite, which has many advantages. The Richlite is abrasion and corrosion-resistant material; it can support any edge details, including custom-edge designs, and several color options. It is also an ideal substitute for hardwood and steel, which can be applied to different areas; architectural millwork, furniture, industrial works, musical instruments, and others. However, other movable modules use aluminum as material. The author designed the shape of the pin like a snowflake, due to, the gap formed by the intersection of each line of the backboard, this shape can fit well on each side, and it is better fixed on the backboard, which is not easy to fall off.
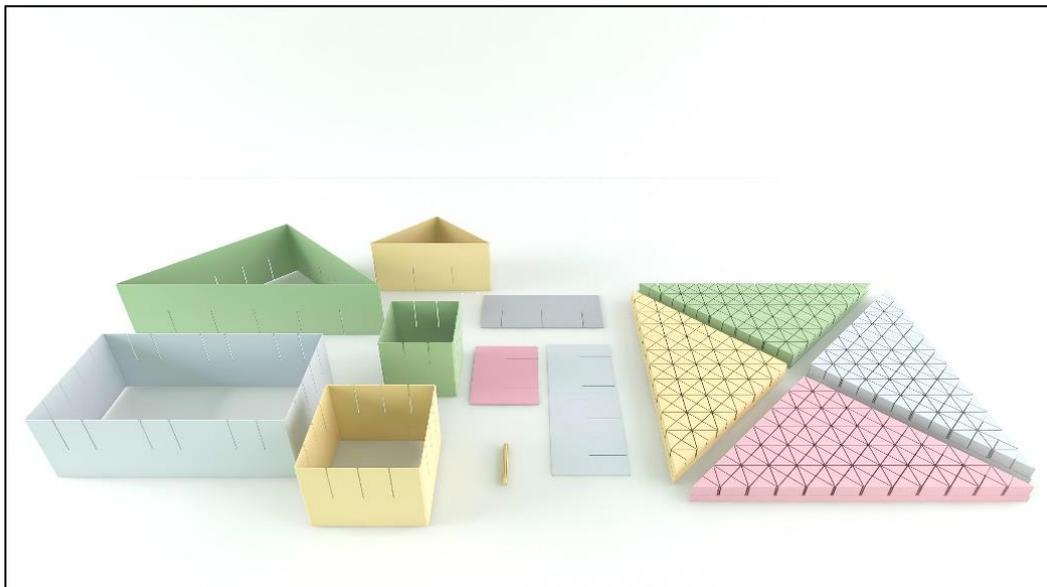

Figure 7 Each unit module of the grid system design

Since the materials used are waterproof and corrosion-resistant materials, it can be applied to more areas beyond solving the problem of desktop clutter. For instance, it can be applied to the walls of different interior spaces, such as the bathrooms (Figure 8), kitchens (Figure 9), and others.

Figure 8 The designed grids applied in the bathroom

Figure 9 The designed grids applied in the kitchen

5. Conclusion

The design language of Naoto Fukasawa's work inspired the author to develop this grid system design and minimalism, which, as the author understands, is not about having as few things as possible, but about defining your necessities. This system design gives people much space to create and assemble, and does not limit people's use of its functions but let them define their use functions. There are only four modules, which realize the different functionality through different combinations, and entirely realize the minimalist design concept of "Less is More."

The principles of minimalism place a higher requirement on the designer because they need to consider many factors such as diversified ways of style, their living environments, and interpersonal relationships between humans and society and combine them jointly to arrive at a clear and clutter-free solution.

Finally, a clean desktop is not only to achieve the purpose of minimalism. Still, it can improve people's lives through a neat space, give people a pleasant mood, and enhance the quality of life and work. This minimalized design may create and define people's own experiences and allow them to discover and find the essential things for themselves.

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