

## Fujitsu ActivateNow 2021

Building Community through Social and Digital Innovation in the Post-COVID-19 Era

Social entrepreneur Lord Andrew Mawson's successful revitalisation of a derelict district of London began with helping one woman set up a dance school in a church hall. Small initiatives like this connected local people and led to the creation of a new sense of community. His efforts at building win-win relationships with local residents and establishing ties with all kinds of small businesspeople eventually led to the development of the Bromley by Bow Centre, one of the U.K.'s most notable social enterprises, boasting 89 businesses and four health facilities.

These activities led to Lord Mawson's later involvement in the construction of the Olympic Park for the 2012 London Olympics and other urban development projects in the greater East London area, which have left a new legacy for London.

In this dialogue, Lord Mawson speaks with Fujitsu director Yoshiteru Yamada about the ideal approach to community-building for the post-COVID-19 era and how digital technology should be used to support communities.

—For today's dialogue, let's divide our discussion about the process of building and developing a community into three stages—"place", "pathways", and "community".

■ Dialogue Theme 1 Creating a "place"— How did you create a "place"?

— **Even in politics and business, it's necessary to create a place where people can meet face to face. So, initially, it's vital to understand issues from a micro perspective —**

### **Lord Mawson**

I want to start by saying a few words about my work. I grew up in the city of Bradford in the north of England. After studying theology at university, I became a Christian minister in the Baptist Church. Later, in the East End of London, where I was sent to work, I founded the Bromley by Bow Centre (BBBC), an integrated community hub run by local residents and the voluntary sector.



The East End was a very poor area in the 1980s. Although the government spent huge amounts of money trying to assist the poor, nothing was working. The first thing I did was set up a small dance school at my church. Next, we set up a childcare facility, gradually shaping a community of people of very diverse nationalities, ages, religions, and incomes. This community revitalisation initiative at BBBC evolved into a working model for integrating health care, employment, housing, and education, which is now being used for community revitalisation programs throughout the U.K.



Through these activities I gradually got involved in other housing, education, and public health projects. In 2007, I was made a life peer and became a crossbencher (an independent member of the House of Lords). In later years I was involved in London's bid for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games as well as the development of the Olympic Park for the games.

Even now, after COVID-19, I am continuing to expand my activities by launching “local communities”—15 innovative platforms for linking together the public sector, social sector, and business entrepreneurs.

**Yoshiteru Yamada**

What made you want to create this “place”, Bromley by Bow, in such a desolate area?

**Lord Mawson**

For me, it was all about the people. I believed that interpersonal relationships were more likely than processes or strategies to lead the community in the right direction. There were many people in the East End who felt a desire to rebuild the community. They just didn’t know how to do it.

So, I moved to the East End with my family, and while building relationships with local people, I slowly established the Bromley by Bow Centre. I not only talked with them about what we needed to do or what we should do, but we also took action, as if we were starting a small business. Getting the locals to run various projects on their own, led to the generation of jobs, and to a revitalisation of the community.

**Yoshiteru Yamada**

Did you face any difficulty with age or nationality barriers when you were trying to develop a community?

**Lord Mawson**

My work in Bromley by Bow radically changed my views about people. Instead of looking at people in terms of their age or nationality, I came to define them by their eagerness and spirit to take on challenges, their sense of humour, and the way they relate to others.

Government assistance often fails because it classifies people by putting them into boxes, rather than seeing them as individual members of a community who interact with other people. Successful businesspeople care about each and every customer. Even when we think about solving macro problems, we should first meet the people on the ground to find out what is happening at the micro level. By looking at trees, we can grasp the big forest. Unless governments and public servants focus on real people on the ground, they cannot bring about any change.

**Yoshiteru Yamada**

In September of this year, Japan launched a “Digital Agency”, which is working on user interface and user experience issues to enhance administrative services. I think that what you say about the need to confront people individually has something in common with the purpose of the Digital Agency.

■ Dialogue Theme 2 “Pathways” for connection

## **Connecting people with technology — looking at purpose beyond technology —**

—To expand a “place” and connect it to the outside world, a “pathway” is necessary. I understand that you extended and expanded your social entrepreneurial activities to the whole of the U.K. through a volunteer community, the Community Action Network (CAN). Can you say something about this network?

### **Lord Mawson**

CAN is an online volunteer community that I founded with four other entrepreneurs in 1997. At that time, the Internet and email were just starting to get popular, but it was still unclear how these technologies could be useful. Ever since, I’ve been thinking about how technology can be used to connect people. And through my work with CAN, I have learned about building online communities.

### **Yoshiteru Yamada**

Very few people had access to the Internet in 1997. How did you get more and more people into online communities?

### **Lord Mawson**

As an example, right after we launched the CAN online platform, we held a two-day workshop to teach people how to use the Internet. YouTube and social media didn’t exist yet, so we just gathered people in one place where CAN technical staff taught them, step by step, how to use the Internet.



Through small-scale activities like this, CAN expanded the circle of community little by little. The important point here is to learn by doing. This is true for the Internet, community-building, other social initiatives, and everything. It is essential to learn by putting your hands to work, rather than just absorbing what a think tank or university convinces you of.

**Yoshiteru Yamada**

On the other hand, as technology has advanced in recent years, the reliability of information has become an important issue, in terms of knowing what is true or fake. How do you feel about this problem?

**Lord Mawson**

This is a very important issue. Technology can distort reality. It can manipulate and even demean people.

And we don't know what happens to our children online. We need some degree of control. Truth resides in the lives of real people; not in the online world.

Some companies try to exploit technology for commercial gain. Companies should feel a sense of responsibility for their communities and think about how they can do the right thing by them.

**Yoshiteru Yamada**

I agree. For example, in terms of data utilisation, the key point for me is how we can ensure good governance and data protection while enjoying greater convenience in our lives. At Fujitsu, we talk about "Trusted Society", a concept about communicating the importance of digital transformation and using technology to promote prosperity in a way that gives rise to greater trust in society.

From your business stories, I get the impression that you are connecting the country, companies, and citizens in win-win relationships. Do you know the term "three-way satisfaction"? In Japan this phrase expresses a business philosophy that means "good for the seller, good for the buyer, and good for the world". It seems to apply nicely to your activities.

**Lord Mawson**

It's a concept rooted in old Japanese culture, isn't it? I have heard of it. We need to think about and give more importance to culture and history. There is so much wisdom in history. My mother, who is 103 years old, is full of wisdom. There is so much wisdom embodied in culture, and we need to understand it.

■ Dialogue Theme 3 Creating a "community"

— **The London Olympics, a public participation-style event made possible by community ties**

—Following on from “place” and “pathways”, let’s conclude our discussion with “community”. You were involved in London’s bid to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, as well as the development of a new Olympic Park complex for the games. Could you speak a little about this?

**Lord Mawson**

I was involved in the London Olympic and Paralympic Games project from the very first meeting. Initially, Paris, not London, was considered the most likely city to win the 2012 hosting rights. Land prices in London were skyrocketing at the time, and nobody knew where it would be possible to build the necessary sports facilities.

Eventually, I found a disused site in the Lower Lea Valley area of East London, along the waterways. Convinced that these waterways could become a valuable resource for the British economy for the next 200 years, I proposed an urban development plan for utilising the waterways, titled “Water City”. The plan was to construct the Olympic Park on the disused land, along with family housing and educational facilities around it. With this “Water City” concept, we were confident of rivalling Paris for the rights to host the Olympic Games.



**Yoshiteru Yamada**

I imagine it was very difficult to plan a project that involved the public sector. What were the most essential points of your “Water City” plan?

**Lord Mawson**

Basically, we just focused on turning the plan into reality. Instead of being content with discussions, we concentrated on working hand-in-hand with people in the community to move the plan forward

and build businesses. On top of the fact that the London Olympic and Paralympic Games were successfully held, we were able to leave a lasting legacy for future generations. Today, the Olympic Park and surrounding areas are home to a wide variety of businesses.

### **Yoshiteru Yamada**

Japan just recently finished hosting the Olympics, so we need to think seriously about how to hand down a legacy from the games. Based on what you said, it seems to me that this kind of initiative should be tackled in partnership by the private and public sectors, rather than by the public sector alone.

—Finally, what message would you like to give to Fujitsu and to the entrepreneurs of Japan, and also to our government?

— **Innovation happens when you get close to people and connect them together** —

### **Lord Mawson**

Undoubtedly, the important thing is connecting people to people. Not in theory, but in practice. And both the micro and macro levels are important. The successful businesspeople I know always take a strong interest in individual customers; that is, they take a strong interest in what happens at the micro level. However, don't just follow their opinions like sheep. Try to connect with the micro-level reality by interacting sincerely with local people and understanding the context behind their reality. I honestly hope that Fujitsu, Japanese entrepreneurs, and the government can develop the mindset of getting close to and standing with the individual people whose lives they impact.



Lord Andrew Mawson OBE, social entrepreneur, Christian minister

After studying theology at the Victoria University of Manchester, Andrew Mawson became a Christian minister in the Baptist Church. Starting with the establishment of Bromley by Bow, a church-based community centre, he has since played an instrumental role in a number of projects, including London's bid to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. In 2007, he was honoured with a life peerage in recognition of the social impact of his work.

[www.wellnorthenterprises.co.uk](http://www.wellnorthenterprises.co.uk)

[www.amawsonpartnerships.com](http://www.amawsonpartnerships.com)



Yoshiteru Yamada, Director, Fujitsu Limited

On joining Fujitsu in 1986, he worked as a systems engineer. Later he engaged in sales work with government agencies and municipalities in the quasi-public sector field. After stints as a general manager in the Hokkaido and Kyushu branch offices and the East Japan Business Division, and then concurrently serving as assistant head of the Japan Region Division and general manager of the Digital Business Promotion Office, in October 2021 he was appointed general manager of the Japan Region Public Digital Business Division.