Design 1.0, 2.0, 3.0
Making Sense of Design Now

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Responds to questions from

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**Design 1.0, 2.0, 3.0** is part of a new series called AskNextD in which questions submitted by journalists, post-graduate students, and design educators are addressed by the NextD team and shared with readers.

In August 2005, Mr. Sune Aagaard a writer at Kontrabande, a journalistic consultancy in Denmark submitted eight questions while researching and writing articles for INDEX on “how the methodology of design is affecting innovation processes in organizations”

Mr. Sune’s articles are scheduled to appear in a special edition of Monday Morning, (regularly published in Copenhagen) about INDEX: and "The design agenda". The magazine is being designed by students from Art Center College of Design in California and will contain approximately ten articles.
Question 1. **Sune Aagaard:** If you ask consultancies like The Idea Factory or IDEO, they will argue that companies and organizations increasingly recognize the problem solving potential in working with designers and the design methodology. A magazine like *Business Week* has also written extensively about the importance of design skills and how valuable they are and will become for companies. At the same time, you write on the NextD-website that “the simple truth is that design is increasingly being left out of the up-front thinking and strategic portion of complex problem solving situations.” Do you agree that designers are more sought after than before and do you find that they don’t have the skills to help people? If so, why do more and more people want to work with designers and make use of their methodology?

**GK VanPatter:** Well, ironically, I guess your question ultimately relates back to what you are engaged in here as a design journalist: what you want to be and how you want to approach the design innovation story. Do you want to write promotional materials for the consultancies and conferences or do you want to write honestly about the realities of the design community, design education, etc? That is ultimately a choice that you have to make yourself. Presently what you find in the marketplace is an ocean of promotion and very little real design journalism. When we created NextD Journal in 2002, we really had no idea that we would attract such a large global readership, very hungry for something other than old style promotions of the promotions. We discovered a tremendous appetite out there in our own community for more than spin. Now we see hundreds of design community bloggers joining in the same sense-making spirit of NextD Journal, but I am getting ahead of myself here.

Let me back up one step to provide some context: I wish I could tell you that there was a simple one-view Norman-Rockwell-like picture, all rosy and perfect, of where design is today, but the reality is that is not the case. Where we are as a community is complicated, messy, continuously changing with multiple faces and conflicting issues. This is not so unlike the real dynamics in other professional fields as the world around us is itself in a state of constant change.

In that context of complexity it is important to understand the kinds of apples, oranges and pears that you have mixed together in your question. While consultancies like IDEO and our own Humantific are businesses, NextD is a community awareness building initiative. These are two very different types of organizations and they naturally have different approaches to positioning and communication.

When you are referencing views from the design consultancies, what you are seeing there is only part of the picture. What you see there is what we call the Yin of the Yin-Yang.
The Yin view of design is promotionally oriented. This is the business view of where design is today: ready to go to work with its existing skill-set. Consultancies have infrastructure, people and services to sell. Let's not get that confused with the reality of where the community actually is, where our design education institutions are or what issues we face. If we mistake the promotional Yin picture for reality, we lose our orientation in the real world, we lose the need in our own community for change.

It is important to understand the marketplace context. Ultimately there is much at stake here. Designers must now compete in the marketplace for innovation leadership roles. The design community, especially our graduate design education institutions, cannot afford to lose that need for change even though selling and promoting their status quo is much easier and more pleasant to do. It is a view into that need for change that you are looking at when you read NextD Journal.

The broader initiative of NextD straddles both the Yin and the Yang. In the last year NextD has sponsored and co-promoted several leading design conferences in collaboration with our friends, the Institute of Design at IIT in Chicago. Presently NextD is sponsoring the IIT design conference to be held this December in China.

Since Humantific is the primary corporate sponsor of NextD, we have become, somewhat by accident, a model for how a consultancy can - with a robust point of view, few resources and lots of effort - participate in the leadership on both sides of the equation. Balancing the Yin-Yang is probably the most difficult part of what we do through the NextD platform.

The bigger picture gets a little complicated when you realize that the business magazines are not shying away from calling for change in their own community, in the structure of business schools, etc. Let's not overlook that this is really what they are doing. This kind of business change initiative, which cycles through the economy every ten years or so, has sold a lot of business magazines. To their credit, they are openly writing about and talking about the need for change among themselves. Why would we in our community of brave and insightful people shy away from our own need for change? What does it say about the state of design journalism if all we are doing in our own community is writing promotions of the promotions? We can and must do better. Let's not take our own community press releases too seriously. There remains a lot of work to be done and a new generation of design journalists could certainly help.

In your question you made reference to “the design methodology” as if it was monolithic. I would suggest to you that there is not one methodology but rather hundreds operating under the banner of design today.
Making sense of all the innovation tools and models floating around is an important part of what next generation design leaders already have to know how to do. This is part of their sense-making function operating in a sea of complexity. Perhaps we can talk more about this later.

Question 2. **Sune Aagaard:** Do you find that designers have skills which are valuable for companies and organizations – other than in the design departments – and, if so, what are those skills?

**GK VanPatter:** This is a big, rather complicated question. Keep in mind that the field of design now encompasses hundreds of disciplines. While I am not exactly sure what you had in mind with this question, it is important to be aware that today some designers are designing organizations and companies. For example: Right now one of our projects at Humantific is the design of a new company that will compete with Google. We are involved in designing the structure of the company, the innovation strategy, the culture, the values, the product development process, how teams are structured, how innovation capability will be constructed, as well as what this new organization will look and feel like for customers and employees.

This kind of work is still not reflected well in the category structures of most design conferences including, I have to say, INDEX. We were surprised to see how traditional the categories were there. If you want to write in an informed way about current design and innovation models I would recommend not jumping off from those assumptions. From our perspective those categories largely reflect where design once was, not where it is.

Today, design comes in many shapes and sizes so value can be delivered in all kinds of useful ways. Some of those shapes have been around for many years in the form of traditional design consultancies while new shapes are constantly forming, recombining, and morphing. One of the great things about design is that it can help at so many levels and intersections. There are consultancies that focus on very small scale specialized services and others who are geared up to participate in enormous organizational transformation challenges. I believe design, with a small d or with a big D, can add value at either end of that spectrum and many points in between.

One of the complexities that we encounter in discussing the design community in NextD Journal is that design exists in so many forms that it is difficult to convey what part of design one is talking about at any given moment. As a complex organism the design community is actually a multitude of communities that exists in different states or Revs all at the same time. After engaging in many NextD Journal conversations it seems clear that there are 3 primary Revs in existence today. This is a simple construct that might help you make sense of what you are looking at as you research your articles. We refer to the primary states as Design Revs 1, 2, 3.
There are considerable differences between the Revs. Each has its own “design agenda”. I am guessing by your, questions here that you are most familiar with and most often referring to Rev2 when you use the terms design, design methodology and design innovation.

Now if the question was where is most of the design community focused, where are our design schools focused, where is much of the design press focused, the answer to that question is largely still in the realm of design as object. Design magazines like to have cool stuff to take photographs of. They have entire business models built around that logic. A large portion of the design community has had ties into that logic for decades. Let’s call this the Rev1 model. From the innovation perspective, there is a certain scale to Rev1 and it primarily evolves around product scale innovation.

**Design 1.0 Models**

It is no secret that consumer-branded product design and more recently branded experience design remains where a large part of the community is focused. It is a huge business. Organizations seeking fresh approaches to product and or experience design will certainly find a lot of experts who can help them in the design community. Design research, ethnography, participatory design, and other techniques have all been integrated into the consumer product design process. The community has increasingly sophisticated skills and processes for this type of work, which tends to evolve around what we call framed or semi-framed challenges. In the now traditional Rev1 design model, designers engage with their toolset as soon as the client has decided that her/his organization needs new products. Rev1 design models are particularly useful to organizations who know exactly what they want and what they need. If you put your design journalist hat, on you will see that issues in this model include not having tools to engage until a challenge is defined. This does not sync well with the realities of how challenges or opportunities present themselves in the real world.

Of course, some parts of our community are questioning whether or not consumer product design is a worthy application of so much design brain-power. Some, insightful design observers such as John Thackara are questioning the absence of human-centered awareness and sustainability responsibilities in product development today. This is the activist model of design, designers as content experts, designers as moral, social and or environmental activists. The community has an entire stream of folks exploring such issues and some believe this is the future of design. For organizations in need of this kind of help, there is certainly no shortage of knowledgeable people in the design community who can provide direction. At NextD Journal, we are very interested in this stream but we have concerns that this is a conversation too often focused on the assumption that design and innovation are about products. We believe design is much bigger and capable of much more.
Design 2.0 Models

Newer design models can be seen as you move towards what we call the B4Design space. (See attached model: ReRethinking Design) In this operating space, challenges and opportunities are less clear, less defined. Some consultancies have operated for numerous years at the edge of the B4Design space, meaning that if you tell them you need a new toothbrush product designed, they will back up in process and look at all kinds of human behaviors around teeth cleaning. They will also look at the entire teeth cleaning industry and perhaps even related industries. They might research the history of teeth cleaning in various countries around the world as well as current marketplace trends in teeth cleaning. Being very user behavior focused, they will fill an entire room with candid photographs of consumers engaged in teeth cleaning and its interconnected rituals. They might create photographs of teeth cleaning at home, at the office, on the subway, etc. Heck they might even stretch into pet teeth cleaning and have a few photos of dogs and cats as well.

This is an approach that arrived on the scene approximately ten years ago and is still being refined. It is most often referred to as Human-Centered design. Although it has been around for years and applied through numerous cycles of the economy, ironically it seems to have only recently been discovered by the new business press. That is an entire story unto itself. The central design school promoting this view of design and teaching these skills is IIT in Chicago, which is likely the most process-oriented graduate design school in the United States today. The Institute of Design at IIT has been one of the central drivers behind the notion that design and product innovation are directly connected. They deserve a lot of credit for raising awareness in this regard. Organizations in need of new products and services are finding these techniques and this product innovation toolbox to be extremely useful.

Of course, putting on your insightful design journalist hat, you would see that the process described above remains focused on product and service design. From our perspective, it is still focused on relatively framed challenges. I believe you will discover that among the issues with this model is lack of transference, meaning that if you are working on product design the toolbox works well, but what happens when you are asked to lead a complex innovation project, involving multiple non-design disciplines that has nothing to do with products? Adaptability is an issue with this specialized product-oriented toolset.

In addition, most of the techniques in Rev2 are what we call outbound, meaning that they do not have much to do with how the cross-disciplinary team will work together more effectively. In Rev2 the focus is on observing consumer behavior rather than on improving the project team’s behavior. So for example: learning ethnography as an outbound project skill is very useful but it won’t have much impact on the team’s ability to work together, to generate ideas, make decisions, and generally navigate through an entire innovation process together.
This is what many organizations are ultimately after. Increasingly, they want to move beyond the model where they have consultants devise one-off products. They seek to bring innovation process skills in-house in ways that will allow them to address many kinds of challenges and opportunities in their world, not just product creation.

Our concern with the Rev2 model is that there is a tendency to assume that outbound techniques are all the innovation sauce required. Another way to say this is there is a tendency to assume that little inbound new learning and change are needed. Of course, observing consumer behavior is a lot easier than changing individual and team behavior. This model works well for the design schools because it implies that there is no need for them to change. It implies that there is no need for them to teach their students cross-disciplinary innovation behavior skills. Unfortunately, the Rev2 design model effectively sidesteps the central territory that is fundamentally transforming the innovation industry.

At NextD, we believe that design itself has to become much bigger than product-scale innovation mastery, and much smarter than mastery of outbound skills. This is one of the central topics in our Journal conversations.

**Design 3.0 Models**

Further up into the strategic B4Design space are some consultancies participating in what we call “defuzzing the future”, by that we mean helping organizations figure out what their challenges and opportunities actually are and then helping them move forward into the future in human-centered ways. This involves much more than product and service design. A new generation of design related consultancies are devising ways to become more involved in complex organizational issues, in the creation of organizations and in their many innovation-related systems.

As design consultancies move from the space where challenges were pre-framed and consumer product creation was the intended outcome to the more strategic space where challenges are broader, much more fuzzy, and possible outcomes vary, there is need for new skills and tools. This is an entire conversation unto itself as it has huge implications.

This need for a different toolbox, applicable to inbound and outbound challenges, is part of what is driving the transformation of what design consultancies look like, what expertise they encompass, how they go to market and what services they deliver.

Some consultancies do this work as one-off transformational experiences. A few are also engaged in transferring that knowledge back into the client organizations as repeatable skill, “teaching how to bake”. In the Rev3 model that teaching encompasses inbound and outbound skill.
Some consultancies are helping to develop the cross-disciplinary innovation tools, processes and behaviors. Some are involved in building bakeries, designing bakery-like organizations as referred to previously. This is very different work then what is going on in the Rev1 and Rev2 models. The challenges of the Rev3 space often cannot be addressed with outbound skills alone.

At Humantific, we increasingly find that organizations want the cross-disciplinary innovation skills transfer, not just a new loaf of co-created bread. Working with organizations on innovation related challenges, we certainly could not do what we do with just outbound skills.

It took more than a few sentences to sketch that three part picture but here is the punch line: It is at this intersection where designers are called upon to move from doing the baking behind closed doors, to having to co-create and ultimately transfer repeatable skills that much of the transformation of our own industry is taking place. (See attached model: Design in the Real World is Changing)

It is this intersection that is driving the transition from implicit innovation skills, (what we call “wave the wand skills”) to more explicit skills that can be explained, modeled, taught, repeated and scaled.

The traditional “designers as creatives” - “wave the wand” methodology still popular in the Rev1 model does not do well in this new context. It is no secret that the traditional design model was based largely on never explained “magic” occurring behind closed doors. For those operating Rev3 models those days are already long gone. Gone are the days when we are in the room only for the purpose of product creation and gone are the days when “wave the wand” methods were enough.

In this Rev3 operating space, innovation has to be a universal process language applicable to all kinds of complex challenges and opportunities and one that many disciplines participate in, not just designers. Among other things, this means that it has to be more than a product design process.

Rev3 model consultancies have a clear view into what about the old design models needs to change and why. In the Rev3 context it is recognized that outbound methods are not enough when the objective is adaptive innovation skill-building. For designers to move from being “critical thinkers” to the enablers of innovation dynamics a lot has to happen behind the scenes to make that happen. Consultancies operating Rev3 models are still relatively small in number but they do exist. Those doing various versions of this work include IDEO’s Transformation by Design practice, Stone Yamashita & Partners in California and Humantific in New York. In the marketplace some Rev2 model consultancies can be seen working hard to move into the Rev3 space.
At NextD, we believe the most interesting and innovative design/innovation consultancy combinations today may encompass product or service design as part of their business, but that no longer represents the big picture of where the design community is heading in this future that has already arrived.

**Question 3. Sune Aagaard:** What are the consequences for both the structure and the culture of companies who want to learn from the design methodology and to use it in order to become more innovative?

**GK VanPatter:** I am not sure if that is a question or a statement. There seems to be a rather forceful assumption built in that companies need to learn from designers. This seems to be Yin talk. In many cases this is true, but let’s be honest about what this really means. Let’s be careful and clear about which design and which innovation we are talking about here. Again, if what you have in mind is Rev2 product innovation, then your statement makes sense. Organizations becoming more innovative however, does not necessarily mean becoming better at product design. Let’s not confuse the knowledge and skills of Rev2 with the broader innovation challenges of Rev3. There are likely completely different parts of the design community engaged depending on which “design” and which “innovation” you are referring to.

For example, some of our Humantific clients are design companies seeking to move from one Rev to another and/or improve their performance within their present Rev. In addition we see many designers in our NextD workshops who are there seeking skills to lead in the context of Rev3. Many mid-career designers tell us that they are being asked to do many innovation leadership tasks that their traditional Rev1 and Rev2 design educations have not prepared them for. Others suggest that they are not taken seriously as leaders in their companies because they do not have the process skills applicable for the continuously changing Rev3 context. This is part of the complexity of the community. Before we go off and sell ourselves as the flavor of the month saviors of business let’s be aware of what some of these complexities in our own community actually are.

**Question 4. Sune Aagaard:** If companies choose to take that step are the consequences dramatic? Do you for instance have to recruit a whole bunch of new people or can the skills and methods which designers have be taught to non-designers and become operational skills?

**GK VanPatter:** For those interested in Rev1 & Rev2 innovation methods, these are skills that individuals, teams and organizations can learn. For those interested in Rev3 innovation, including designers, these are also skills that can be learned. Humans are amazingly adaptable creatures.

How to create inclusive innovation cultures, how to create a common universal cross-disciplinary innovation language and how to scale innovation skill so that it becomes part of everyday operations are three important aspects of Rev3 work.
Question 5. **Sune Aagaard**: How can design leadership be developed to better address the challenges ahead?

**GK VanPatter**: This is another giant question. Unfortunately there is not space or time enough to respond in detail in this forum. Suffice it to say that the very first step in that process is to recognize the degree to which the realms of innovation have changed. Let’s not walk into the already ongoing innovation party, with a lamp-shade on our head, thinking we in the design business own innovation. It is already a competitive environment that involves many disciplines outside of design who are mastering innovation skills. Some have been operating in the innovation space for many years. Without recognition that designers now have to compete for innovation leadership roles, there is little reason for our design education institutions to change. The reality is that the world is moving faster then the capacity for these large institutions to change. With that in mind it seems more likely that new paths through the forest will be created by the small inventive organizations that are cropping up in various parts of the design community. They are more agile, and often much further along in the cross-disciplinary innovation knowledge-building curve. At NextD, we find that those models are taking shape as internal initiatives, new consultancies, specialized institutes, community initiatives and other forms. On the NextD website we have begun a list of organizations that are participating in the creation of next design. Needless to say, it is not a neat or linear path.

Question 6. **Sune Aagaard**: Is the burning platform related to increasing the awareness among designers of the skills which they already possess, rather than about designers learning new skills?

**GK VanPatter**: On the NextD site, we use the burning platform metaphor to refer to the changing nature of innovation and design leadership. The traditional thinking from twenty years ago was that designers are always going to lead design. Most of our design school programs are still based on this logic.

That old model went out the window with the arrival of cross-disciplinary innovation. For most adults, adapting themselves to the new cross-disciplinary innovation dynamics involves unlearning some deeply ingrained old habits and learning some new skills.

Question 7. **Sune Aagaard**: Why are designers important when one wants to be better at cross-disciplinary innovation acceleration?

**GK VanPatter**: My friend, this is another loaded statement/question. As per my earlier comments, Rev3 model consultancies have a lot to contribute to cross-disciplinary innovation acceleration of all kinds. Rev2 model consultancies have a lot to contribute to product innovation and Rev1 has a lot to contribute if your product needs are very well defined.
Now that we have these fundamental notions sorted out we could likely expend an entire conversation on how Rev3 model consultancies engage in cross-disciplinary innovation acceleration work. Perhaps we can have that conversation another time.

As we head for home on this one, I encourage you to think deeply about your mission and the many opportunities at hand in this regard. The design community could use a whole lot more of our own design journalism. There is considerable opportunity for a new generation of design journalists to emerge. Right now much of what is being written about where design is and what it does, is being created by the new business journalists. If the truth were told, it would be that much of what is being written there is relatively unsophisticated old hat. Rather than jumping on that bandwagon because it serves our promotional interests, the design community should be doing a much better job of writing its own authentic story. At NextD Journal, we have found tremendous interest in authentic views into the trials, tribulations and triumphs of design. I believe you will find this to be a much more difficult story to write, but ultimately a more enduring and useful one.

I wish you much luck with your article.

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