Designing Conversations for Socially-Conscious Design


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“Design and cybernetics are really the same thing.”

— Ranulph Glanville, 2014
Challenges of design

Energy
Global warming
Water
Food
Population
Health
Equality
Social justice
Challenges to design

- Energy
- Global warming
- Water
- Food
- Population
- Health
- Equality
- Social justice
Challenges to design

Energy
Global warming
Water
Food
Population
Health
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Simple problems
Complex problems / systems of systems
“Wicked problems”*

* In the strict sense of Rittel & Webber
Design = Social
Design = Social
Designing with myself
Design = Social
Designing with myself
Designing with others
Design = Conversations for Action
Designing with myself
Designing with others
Designing Conversations is the heart of 21st-century design practice
Designing Conversations is the heart of 21st-century design practice

Designing for Conversations by Everyone
Designing Conversations is the heart of 21st-century design practice
Designing for Conversations by Everyone
Designing for Conversations for Design
We believe cybernetics offers a foundation for 21st-century design practice, with this rationale:

If design, then systems.
If design, then systems.

If systems, then cybernetics.
If design, then systems.

If systems, then cybernetics.

If cybernetics, then second-order cybernetics.
If design, then systems.

If systems, then cybernetics.

If cybernetics, then second-order cybernetics.

If second-order cybernetics, then conversation.

Design...
Design... from Thinking to Conversation
What is the process of Design Thinking?

- Observe
- Brainstorm
- Prototype
What Does that mean?

Ethnography

Open-ended idea generation

Making and testing

Observe

Brainstorm

Prototype
What Does that mean?

- Observe
- Brainstorm
- Prototype

Evaluate
What Does that mean?

Observe

Brainstorm

Prototype

Iterate

Evaluate
Limitations

Specific?  
Rigorous?  
Repeatable?

Observe  
Brainstorm  
Prototype  
Iterate  
Evaluate
Limitations

Specific?
Rigorous?
Repeatable?

Observe
Brainstorm
Prototype

Iterate
Evaluate

Clear?
Quantifiable?
Directed?
Design the Conversations

- Design the Conversations
- Brainstorm
- Prototype

Iterate
Evaluate
Design the Conversations

- Design the Conversations
- Brainstorm
- Prototype

Iterate
Evaluate
Find a Focusing Question

Design the Conversations

Find a Focusing Question

Prototype

Iterate

Evaluate
Requirements for Focusing Questions
Requirements for Focusing Questions

Actionable information flows, not transformation of mass & energy—so it participates in the new economy, the move from “atoms to bits.”
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Economic potential—removing uncertainty in the market, creating order from disorder, lowering the human cost of achieving our goals, are all worth something.
Requirements for Focusing Questions

**Actionable information flows**, not transformation of mass & energy—so it participates in the new economy, the move from “atoms to bits.”

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**Consistent with the social system**—connecting to who we are (our history) and what we can see ourselves engaging in.
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Engage individuals who want to do it.
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**Engage individuals who want to do it.**

**Reveal the necessary variety of expertise required** for exploring the question, so that we can define it and make it available (requisite variety).

**Teach the organization** as a whole—so that what is learned can be reproduced.
Find a Focusing Question

Economic Potential
Using bits & reducing uncertainty

Social Potential
Consistent with who we are & want to be

Systemic Potential
Engages variety

Design the Conversations

Find a Focusing Question

Prototype

Iterate
Evaluate
Prototype a Solution

Design the Conversations

Find a Focusing Question

Prototype a Solution

Iterate

Evaluate
Iterate & Evaluate

- Design the Conversations
- Find a Focusing Question
- Prototype a Solution

Iterate

Evaluate
Iterate & Evaluate

Measure Improvements for Users

Design the Conversations

Find a Focusing Question

Prototype a Solution
Iterate & Evaluate

Measure
Improvements for Users

Measure
Convergence on design goals

Design the Conversations

Find a Focusing Question

Prototype a Solution

Iterate
Evaluate
Conversation is the core

Measure Improvements for Users

Measure Convergence on design goals

Conversation to Agree on Means
Conversation is the core

Measure Improvements for Users

Measure Convergence on design goals

Conversation to Agree on Means
Design… from Thinking to Conversation
Rethinking Design Thinking

Conversation to Agree on Means
Design as Conversation

Conversation to Agree on Means
Design as Conversation

- Conversation to Agree on Goals
  - Iterate
  - Evaluate
- Conversation to Agree on Means
Design as Conversation

Does doing this... achieve this?

Conversation to Agree on Goals

Conversation to Agree on Means

Iterate
Design as Conversation
Design as Conversation

Do we have sufficient variety… to achieve this?
Design as Conversation

Conversation to Design the Designing

Iterate
Evaluate

Conversation to Agree on Goals

Do we have sufficient variety…

to achieve this?
Design as Conversation

Conversation to Design the Designing

Iterate
Evaluate

Conversation to Agree on Goals

Iterate
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Conversation to Agree on Means
Design as Conversation

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Design as Conversation

Conversation to Design the Designing

Iterate

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Conversation to Agree on Means
Design as Conversation

- Conversation to Design the Designing
  - Iterate
  - Evaluate

- Conversation to Agree on Goals
  - Iterate
  - Evaluate

- Conversation to Agree on Means
  - Iterate
  - Evaluate
Given the conversation we've just had, focus on the questions above to make the next conversation successful.

In short, given where we want to go:

- Who are the necessary and sufficient participants?
- What is the necessary and sufficient information?
- What did we learn?
- What questions do we answer next?
- Who can we continue to use who are still essential?
- What expertise do we need to answer those questions?
- What information do we need to answer those questions?
Given the conversation we've just had, focus on the questions above to make the next conversation successful.

What did we learn?

1. Bottom-up approach: Keep asking the important questions that ensure the right participants and the right information in every conversation.

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Client Engagement can be modeled as a series of stages—catalyst, ideation, solution, delivery, and evaluation—each with specific goals, and therefore specific requirements for participants and information to feed the next conversation.

The engagement lifecycle moves through a series of stages, albeit not always smoothly. Core roles—often the "triumvirate" of account, planning, and creative, but increasingly specialized to a given 360° engagement—are responsible for driving to results, and for communicating across stages and across agency and client groups.

Useful stages that apply across most engagement types are:
- catalyst stage (first interaction): initial contact with client
- ideation: building a model of desired outcomes
- solution: creating a plan to achieve the outcomes
- delivery: executing the plan, deploying the solution
- evaluation: measuring against goals, then adjusting.
Design as Conversation

Conversation to Design the Designing

Iterate
Evaluate

Conversation to Agree on Goals

Iterate
Evaluate

? 

Conversation to Agree on Means

Iterate
Evaluate
Notes on the Role of Leadership and Language in Regenerating Organizations.
An organization is its language.

Ultimately, an organization consists of conversations: who talks to whom, about what.

Each conversation is recognized, selected, and amplified (or ignored) by the system. Decisions, actions, and a sense of valid purpose grow out of these conversations.

Conversation leads to agreement. Agreement leads to transaction.
Narrowing language increases efficiency.

Organizations create their own internal language to solve specific problems. This language serves as a kind of shorthand: Managers use it every day, knowing they will be clearly understood.

Over time, this internal language grows increasingly specialized—and narrow.
Narrowing **language** also increases ignorance.

The organization’s internal language is designed to help managers facilitate present-day business—not look beyond it.

Using the internal language, managers increase efficiencies, but cannot recognize new fields of research, new discoveries, new approaches.
Past **language** limits future vision.

Managers understand the organization’s past behavior. But this knowledge, and the language that accompanies it, limit their vision of the organization’s potential future state.

Using the language of the past, managers may try to provide a vision for the future. But it is an old future—a memory of what the future could be.

Managers may strive for fundamental change, but their language prevents them from achieving it.
Expanding **language** increases opportunity.

The conversations necessary for generating new opportunities come from outside the system.

For an organization to survive, it must be able to acquire new, relevant language domains.
To regenerate, an organization creates a new **language**.

To support an organization's future viability, effective decision makers actively introduce change into the system.

They do so by generating new language that appropriate groups in the organization come to understand and embrace.

This new language does not overtly challenge the pre-existing, efficient system, but rather creates new distinctions and supportive relationships.
Design as Conversation

Conversation to Design the Designing

Iterate
Evaluate

Iterate
Evaluate

Conversation to Agree on Goals

Iterate
Evaluate

Iterate
Evaluate

Conversation to Agree on Means

Iterate
Evaluate

?
Design as Conversation

- Conversation to Design the Designing
  - Iterate
  - Evaluate
- Conversation to Agree on Goals
  - Iterate
  - Evaluate
- Conversation to Create New Language
  - Iterate
  - Evaluate
- Conversation to Agree on Means
  - Iterate
  - Evaluate
Design = Social = Conversations for Action
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If we converse explicitly about goals, we are transparent about frames and values.
Design = Social = Conversations for Action

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If we converse about the means to achieve those goals, we more fully engage participants and their abilities, improving outcomes.
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If we converse to co-evolve new language, we can escape the limitations of current viewpoints, and create new frames and new possibilities.
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If we converse about the design process, we enter all our conversations as participants, answerable for our actions.
Design = Social = Conversations for Action

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If we converse to co-evolve new language, we can escape the limitations of current viewpoints, and create new frames and new possibilities. (To create new language is innovative.)

If we converse about the design process, we enter all our conversations as participants, answerable for our actions. (To design the designing is responsible.)
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(To agree on goals is ethical.)

(To agree on means is collaborative.)

(To create new language is innovative.)

(To design the designing is responsible.)
“Conversation is the bridge between cybernetics and design.

— Ranulph Glanville, 2009
Thank you.
See pangaro.com/rsd5 for slides and references

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“Design is the action; Second-order Cybernetics is the explanation.”

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