

Interview on Design Methods

Launching the Imagination : A Guide to Two Dimensional Design
Mary Stewart
McGraw-Hill Higher Education



Trope Collaborative
www.tropecollaborative.com

For more information, please contact:
Adam Kallish
adam@tropecollaborative.com

Profile:

Adam Kallish, Designer/Consultant

Creativity by Design



Adam Kallish has dedicated his career to brand design with underpinnings in business consulting and collaborative deployment of innovation teams for large corporations. His interests range from traditional graphic design and brand strategy to organizational design. These areas are integrated through multidisciplinary teams and program management, linking vision (desire) to requirements (specifications) to results (benefits).

MS: You are an advocate of "Design Methods," which is a particular approach to solving problems. Why?

AK: Designers are often invited into a project after many crucial decisions have been made. They are then urged to "be creative." While developing a great composition is important, the outcome may miss the mark because the designer is entering too late in the game. Design Methods presents a disciplined approach to creativity from the very start.

MS: Please give me some historical background.

AK: Design Methods was developed by John Chris Jones and others in reaction to the scientific reductivism of the post-World War II world. It recognized a new way to solve the world's problems by striking a balance between intuition (imagination, experience, and beliefs) and logic (objectivity, phenomenology, and repeatability). The convergent and divergent strategies described in Chapter Five are a part of Design Methods. In fact, they are interdependent. Rather than simply solve a problem as presented, through Design Methods, we redefine the problem itself, which often leads to a creative breakthrough. From the outset Design Methods combines rationality, proof, and definitions with experience, feelings, and precedent.

MS: Why seek a balance between intuition and logic?

AK: Intuition is based on established patterns derived from our personal experiences. We use it every day, especially when making quick decisions. Yet, a purely intuitive response can only illuminate what has been experienced, not what *can* be experienced.

Thus, intuition provides a narrow doorway into the future. Rationality is based upon logical patterns that many people can understand. But a purely rational approach tends to oversimplify problems and the results are often mediocre.

Innovation acts as a bridge between the two by exploring three key areas: what is desirable, what is possible, and what is viable. Innovation is difficult to achieve because it requires us to move from desirability to viability.

MS: It sounds pretty daunting!

AK: In the beginning, it can feel counterintuitive. But with practice, Design Methods leads to a deeper understanding of both problem seeking and problem solving.

MS: You are really talking about ways to invent the future. What are the essential questions that apply to *all* change processes?

AK: The act of designing is difficult because we tend to seek future solutions using past and current information. For example, the solutions to global warming we develop today will work only if our predictions of the future are correct.

For simple problems involving incremental change, the future is pretty easy to understand. The redesign of an existing object like a poster or a coffee cup has many constraints that are fairly obvious, and a single designer can solve these problems. However, for highly complex problems involving many designers, many interdependencies, and many unknowns, the act of designing can easily fall apart. These four key

questions can guide us when discussing the future. What should we stop doing; what should we start doing; what should we continue doing; and how can we become more effective in what we do?

MS: What is the typical Design Methods sequence?

AK: Step one is Divergence (sometimes called Analysis or Discovery). This stage is about generating doubts, posing insightful questions, exploring what is critical to the stakeholders, including the client and the users.

Step two is Transformation (sometimes called Genesis or Development). This stage is about creating appropriate boundaries and prioritizing information. The criteria and specifications that begin to emerge help the design team agree on a specific course of action.

Step three is Convergence. This stage is about focusing on an emerging solution and narrowing as many variables as possible in implementing a designed result.

With complex problems (such as systems or technological change), this sequence may need to be repeated several times before reaching a final result.

MS: It seems that Design Methods is best used in collaborative situations.

AK: It actually *requires* collaboration among various stakeholders, including clients, marketing personnel, manufacturing, users, and the designers themselves. While individualism seems easier, each of us has too many blind spots and prejudices to create a balanced future. Collaboration provides us with multiple lenses. Through these lenses, we can see our problem more fully. Even though they are harder to manage, teams bring the critical mass of skills and ideas we need when creating the best future for the greatest number of people.

MS: Let's see Design Methods in action.

AK: We can use a project from one of my classes as an example. The Nehring Center, a nonprofit art center in DeKalb, Illinois, needed to expand membership and increase attendance. Working with center director Jessica Witte, we began with an overview of the organization, discussing its goals and objectives, and noting areas for possible improvement. We interviewed a wide range of stakeholders, reviewed activities offered at the Center, analyzed its program content, and considered its affiliations to other institutions. Students began to delve deeply into its operational, marketing, and philanthropic activities and created a prioritized list of challenges.

Students then divided into two teams, one of which focused on issues of identity and the other on fundraising, which were seen as interdependent. Using convergent thinking, the teams redefined their topics and recommended specific actions. Finally, the students presented their findings to Ms. Witte, to a board member, and to School of Art faculty members. After the final presentation, she wrote:

"Design Methods sketches out a plan for the gallery's future and its current needs. I am really thankful that the presentation did not just put a Band-Aid of a logo together for me. Addressing the issue of the gallery in a greater scope . . . is really valuable."

MS: Essentially, it sounds like you took the long way around, and arrived at a more interesting end point.

AK: Yes. Despite its initial difficulty, the full process provoked the students to intensify their investigation. Their conceptual tool kit then allowed them to dig deeper and wrestle with a much more expansive problem space.

