

NextD

Who will lead design in the 21st century?

iMFrame

Innovation Models Evaluation Framework

NextDesign Leadership Institute
41 East 11th Street, 11th Floor
New York, New York, 10003
USA
journal@nextd.org
<http://www.nextd.org>

Copyright © 2003 **NextDesign Leadership Institute**. All Rights Reserved.
NextD text may be quoted and printed freely for non-commercial purposes with proper acknowledgment.
If you wish to reproduce or transmit any of this text for commercial use, please send a copyright
permission request to journal@nextd.org

What is NextD?

NextDesign Leadership Institute was founded in the spring of 2002 for the purpose of helping design educators and practicing professionals around the world, prepare to meet the challenges of cross-disciplinary design and innovation leadership in the 21st century. The Institute has three primary focus areas: NextD Education, NextD Research and the NextD Conference.

For more information see the NextD web site:

www.nextd.org

iMFrame Overview

iMFrame is one of several frameworks that we use at NextD and UnderstandingLab to help us quickly think about and evaluate incoming models or theories related to cross-disciplinary innovation. We often see such models being tabled and discussed in the context of client and or design education discussions. While none of these frameworks is perfect, they do help us to quickly see, in an organized way, the degree to which various models might sync or not sync with the models at the center of NextD. The iMFrame dimensions are based on real world experience regarding leading cross-disciplinary capability building in large multi-disciplinary organizations.

We use a simple 1 to 5 scoring system with five being the highest score. Results can then be plotted to a spider diagram. This allows us to visually compare one model to another. Models and theories that score low across multiple dimensions are likely far away from how we think about cross-disciplinary innovation.

Innovation Models Evaluation Framework

1. Clear/Understandable/Accessible

Is the model reasonably clear and understandable across multiple disciplines?

0 1 2 3 4 5 (5 being highest score)

2. Cross-Disciplinary

Is the innovation model reflective of the cross-disciplinary world?

0 1 2 3 4 5

3. User Centered

Has the model been developed with end users in mind?

0 1 2 3 4 5

4. Reach

Would the model be useful in the strategic terrain of B4Design?

0 1 2 3 4 5

5. Real & Current

Are its ideas in sync with or ahead the current realities facing organizations?

0 1 2 3 4 5

6. Whole

Does the model reflect pattern creating and pattern optimizing?

0 1 2 3 4 5

7. Inclusive

Does the model foster inclusion?

0 1 2 3 4 5

8. Profile Positive

Are all of its profile dimensions depicted positively and without bias?

0 1 2 3 4 5

(We often see profile models with bias embedded. An example would be one where Designers are depicted, as the Creatives while others are not. Such models do not scale well outside of design)

9. Process Depth/Expertise

Does the model reflect deep problem finding/solving process knowledge?

0 1 2 3 4 5

10. Language

Is the model relatively free of tribal language?

0 1 2 3 4 5

11. Challenge Scale

Is the model applicable to large sized complex problems/opportunities?

0 1 2 3 4 5

12. Visual

Can the ideas within be visually modeled?

0 1 2 3 4 5

13. Real Tools

Are there real tangible tools beneath the theory?

0 1 2 3 4 5

14. Learnable Skills

Can the tools be taught and learned?

0 1 2 3 4 5

15. Brain Power

Would the model help to maximize brainpower in organizations?

0 1 2 3 4 5

16. Research

Is there a reasonable amount of research behind the model?

0 1 2 3 4 5

17. Extendable

Are yet to be researched extensions of the model possible?

0 1 2 3 4 5

18. Scaleable

Are the model and tools scaleable across hundreds of people and multiple disciplines within organizations?

0 1 2 3 4 5

19. Generalizable

Can the ideas in the model be generalized to make them applicable in multiple types of organizations?

0 1 2 3 4 5

20. Call to Action

Does the model articulate a clear call to action or use?

0 1 2 3 4 5

Context

For those interested in understanding more about how we introduce and utilize iMFrame in the context of design education community conversations please note below. The following was posted by GK VanPatter to the PHD-Design Community Discussion Forum on April 9 2003 in response to an earlier post by Dr. Ken Friedman called Wicked Problems and Other Problems dated March 23 2003.

Burning Platforms

Design Leadership Challenged & The Architecture of What/Now

Part 1: Seeing the Forest**Part 2: Models Evaluation****Part 3: Rethinking HOW****Part 1: Seeing the Forest**

Without doubt, the subject of problem complexity and complex problem solving is linked to some of the most important issues facing the design communities today. Approaching the subject by positioning wicked problems as exclusive terrain that many designers do not understand or operate in and then focusing on the categorization of problems is, however, only one of many possible approaches to the subject.

From the perspective of NextD, that kind of positioning not only sends a misleading and disempowering message but also fundamentally misses the immediate, central challenges for design in the arena of complex problem solving today. It also too conveniently sidesteps the very direct implications for design educators and design education institutions. Categorizing all the tree types in the forest doesn't necessarily mean that one has a clear view of the forest itself.

Before I wade into this further, let me step back for a moment and try to explain how we think about such issues from the perspective of our UnderstandingLab practice and from the perspective of NextD. Rather than dive into an extended critique of the wicked problems model itself, I think it would be more useful to share a few of the frameworks that we use, to help us sort through the many variables around this and other dialogues going on in academia as well as in practice today.

With time compressed and all of us inundated with information overload, we are faced with having to consciously decide what issues are most important to us. In the limited amount of time that we have, what does it make sense to expend our energies on? Where will we have the most impact? What are the challenges that make sense for us to try to help with?

With our very real constraints in mind we typically ask ourselves a couple of simple questions before responding to every theory or anti-theory, claim or counterclaim, suggestion for focus or the lack thereof that wash over our computer screens on any given day.

We somewhat jokingly call these 2 questions the Architecture of What/Now

**What/Now is the real burning platform?
What/Now is the real call to action?**

For example when looking at the wicked problems thread:

The burning platform being described there seems to be that Designers do not seem to have their definition of wicked problems articulated correctly.

The call to action being described there seems to be that Designers need to get their act together and sort out their definitions.

Clearly this differs significantly from what we see as the central burning platform for design around complex problem solving today. This helps us understand where the thread conversation might fit, into the broad landscape of challenges that we are well familiar with.

By comparison the following is closer to the central burning platform from our humble perspective:

Design is increasingly being left out of the up front thinking and strategic portion of complex problem situations because designers are not learning advanced problem solving skills. Other professionals continue to do so. Other professions are moving in to fill the void as participants and as problem solving leaders.

From our perspective this is closer to the real Call to Action:

Design Educators and their Institutions need to get their act together and figure out how to incorporate advanced problem finding/solving skills into their graduate programs before design schools become places training future skilled labors, not future leaders.

In a way, we are talking about our own problem definitions as leaders and as a community of practice. What problems we define, tells us a lot about the kinds of challenges we are prepared to recognize, acknowledge and take on as a community, or should I say a series of communities. All of us, consciously or unconsciously choose the problem definitions that we want to expend time on.

Sometimes the space above or underneath what is being officially framed as a problem focus is a good place to find substantial challenges and opportunities for design practice, design research, design education, etc.

Part 2: Models Evaluation

Regarding the wicked problems architecture itself and the accompanying list dialogue: Studying models from outside of design has certainly proven to be a great, tried and true way to learn new perspectives. Again I believe it would be most useful to share with you how we view and consider such models, as there are many floating around in the marketplace. To do so we think beyond the singular example of wicked problems.

From our perspective it is important to understand, in a big picture sense, that design is at a period in its history where the demands and opportunities for design in the marketplace, have, to a significant degree, outpaced traditional tools, frameworks, processes, logic-sets and even skill-sets. In order to participate where the leading edge of the problem solving marketplace is going, (where it already is) one has to be prepared to look beyond design for language, tools, etc. A number of the underlying tools that we have incorporated into our practice have not been developed by those steeped in traditional design education.

The point is that depending on where you are engaged in the marketplace, you inevitably begin to create lenses or frameworks through which you can view, consider/evaluate the various tools and models originating inside or outside of design.

For example: A significant stream of our work still involves helping large organizations build cultures that are focused on cross-disciplinary innovation. Building advanced problem finding/solving skills into such cultures is part of that work. How does one do that? With what tools? One of the complications is that once you go cross-disciplinary you leave behind much of the logic and many of the tools that were created in the old

vertically organized design disciplines.

The three part combination of problem complexity rising, the need to do parallel processing and the need to work in cross-disciplinary teams represents HUGE, HUGE change that continues to reverberate through many industries including design. At the tabletop level of human-to-human interaction, the impact of such change on learned behaviors, communication and process cannot likely be overstated.

While working with organizations in this terrain we eventually realized that part of what we were creating with our collaborators was a new logic-set, that is very different from what is still being taught in much of design education today.

Based on this logic-set, we construct new lenses or frameworks that help us think about and even evaluate the many models and theories floating around in the marketplace, whether they are new or historical. While none of these lenses are perfect, they do help us to quickly frame up the degree to which models such as wicked problems might fit or not fit within our building innovation cultures universe.

Here is one of those frameworks:

Innovation Models Evaluation Framework

(Place iMFrame Here)

Suffice it to say that for the kind of work we do, the wicked problems model, as far as I understand it, would not be significantly useful to us. It would score quite low on at least 15 dimensions of the above framework. That does not necessarily mean it would not be useful to others coming from different directions in the universe.

Part 3: Rethinking HOW

For any of you deeply exploring and or trying to unpack the issues around the wicked problems model, I thought it might be most useful to share a couple of additional pieces from this alternate point of view.

Unlike the wicked model, we use a simple construct to help us and our clients think about the kinds of problems they face, and therefore the kind of problem solving skills they need to build in their organization.

We call this the Architecture of HOW. It has 3 primary levels.

Level 3 HOW: mastering unframed challenges

Level 2 HOW: mastering framed challenges

Level 1 HOW: mastering tools

Historically traditional design education has focused on teaching Level 1 & 2 HOW and for the most part it remains focused there today. Unfortunately the growing disconnect is that many of the problems facing client organizations in the global marketplace today, facing the world today, are multi-disciplinary Level 3 challenges.

There are also numerous ways to think about the assumptions and attributes that exist below the upper structure in many of these problem related models. I noted that there was some reference to this level in the wicked problems thread. For those unpacking the model at this level, here are ten comparative assumptions that we make in our problem solving/opportunity framing work.

Unlike the wicked problems model:

- we assume that the term problem solving includes the important up front activity of problem finding.
- we assume, at the outset of all engagements that the problem definitions, (coming from the problem owners) are fuzzy situations not the actual problem definitions.
- we assume that all problems have the potential to be complicated - regardless of whether they happen to be public policy, economic, environment problems, etc.
- we believe that there is no relationship between how visible a problem is and how complex it might be.
- we believe that it is of fundamental importance to separate the Content WHAT from the Process HOW.
- we believe that the fundamental logic of Level 3 HOW is not connected to any particular WHAT.
- we believe that all problem solving involves the orchestration of judgment but that is only one dimension of the equation.
- we believe problem solving to be the foundational language of business and design. We approach its use in that manner.
- we believe understanding plays a significant role in the teaching of problem solving skills across multiple disciplines.
- we consider all problems to be design problems.

In closing, I will just add quickly that NextD is involved in helping to open alternate tracks in the conversation landscape around the subject of design leadership. I believe numerous individuals on this list, including some of those writing, with good intentions, about wicked problems from academic platforms seek the same. Despite our differences of perspective and focus we likely have many things in common.

At NextD Journal in particular, we deeply want to see at least part of the conversation shift away from exclusive, rarified postures that depict complex/wicked problems as sacred territory that few designers understand or operate in. We seek to create a more empowering, action oriented and opportunity framing conversation track. One that is

based in the realities already underway in the marketplace.

One that raises awareness that the real call to action is to make sure that designers will have the skills and tools to lead complex problem solving as the future unfolds.

How the design communities meet such challenges, or fail to do so will have a significant impact on what design, and design leadership becomes in the future.

Hope this is useful.

regards

...

GK VanPatter

Co-Founder

NextDesign Leadership Institute

NextD / Lead the Journey!

<http://nextd.org>

...

NOTE:

Please ask if you want to use any of the text, concepts or frameworks in this document. Write to info@nextd.org with "Research" as the subject.