



Column by [David Silverstein](#)

The Convergence of Design and Innovation

Posted by DAVID SILVERSTEIN at 6:01 PM

Both of these disciplines must be adopted for success.

In my first article for Inc. last year, I wrote about "convergence." I'd like to offer another example of convergence that's taking place these days: the convergence of design and innovation. Just as most approaches to process improvement (e.g., PDCA, Six Sigma) pretty much have the same roots in the scientific method which has been around for a hundred years, so too can most methodical approaches to design be seen as pretty much covering the same bases.

Structured approaches to innovation have been popping up over the last few years as well. Innovative "buzz" started some years ago, leveraging creative techniques that have been around for decades. But it's only in the last five or so years that a new element has been added to most definitions of innovation. Some say innovation is "bringing new ideas to life," or "the act of conceiving new ideas and bringing them to market," or "commercialization of differentiating technology."

The common approaches to design have always had a flaw, though. They focus on how to "design it right the first time," but they don't address the answer to this question: design what? Design methods assume you have a design in mind. Similarly, most approaches to innovation lack an answer to the question of how to bring the creative idea to life -- or to market. So as with most things -- they start discretely and ultimately converge. Today we are seeing the convergence of innovation and design. Innovation (or creative techniques) fills the gap of "what" to design, and design methods allow us to solve the problem of "how" to bring the creative idea to life.

The most popular approach to design in business over the past ten years has become known as "designing for six sigma." There are a few different variations of design for six sigma, but they're all fundamentally the same. On the other hand, there are no widely accepted methods for innovation yet. Some have tried, but nothing has really taken hold -- until now. For the past year my firm has been applying a methodology we call, D4. The four D's in D4 are: Define, Discover, Design and Demonstrate.

We bill D4 as a new methodology, but I have to share a little secret: only the first two D's are really new. The second two are just the old Design for Six Sigma methodologies condensed into two steps instead of a more common four or five. That's because, while it seems obvious to us now, it took quite a bit of time, research and testing with clients for us to realize that we didn't need to start from scratch, but rather just needed to combine design and innovation. The result is D4, and what we've come to learn is that neither design -- nor innovation -- as others know it can really stand on their own. Convergence was inevitable . . . and now you know, too.