

# The Design Leadership Framework

A structured and strategic approach to leading design teams

Katharina Koberdamm | Leadership Ateliers Berlin | May 2024

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# **Input Talk**

The Design Leadership Framework



# Design Leadership



**Creativity**

**Vision**

**Innovation**



# Design Leadership in Organizations...



# Is this important for us?

**Design Systems**

**Agile Leadership**

**Generative AI**

**DesignOps**

**Design Ethics**

**Data Driven Design**

**Journey Management**

...

Image: Unsplash



# Design Teams need leadership and scaling

**Designers becoming managers**

**Little business knowledge**

**New responsibilities**

**New skills**

*Image: Unsplash*



A person stands on a grassy mountain peak, looking out over a vast landscape. In the foreground, the mountain's slope is covered in dry, golden-brown grass. Beyond the peak, a calm blue lake stretches across the middle ground, reflecting the soft light of the sky. In the background, layers of blue-toned mountains recede into the distance under a clear, pale sky. The overall mood is serene and expansive.

# The Design Leadership Framework

- Give an overview of design leadership and management tasks
- Help to develop necessary roles, competencies and capabilities
- Improve communication and alignment in design teams
- Inspire current and future design leaders

# Framework Overview

# THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

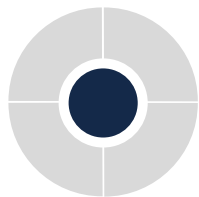
The Five Key Dimensions of Design Leadership





# THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

## Key Dimensions in Detail



### STRATEGY

#### Leadership Mission

Develop a vision and strategy for the design team and the design work.

Manage and execute the necessary initiatives to implement your strategy effectively.

Continuously measure and improve the design practice and design outcomes.

### ASPECTS

Assess  
**Current Situation**

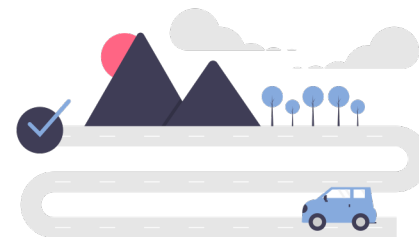
Define  
**Vision & Goals**

Develop  
**Strategy & Roadmap**

Drive  
**Change**

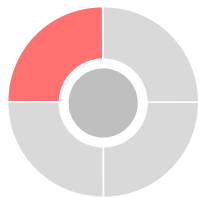
Manage  
**Program Initiatives**

Measure  
**Practice & Performance**



# THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

## Key Dimensions in Detail



### EXPERIENCE

#### Leadership Mission

Promote a human-centered perspective and design-driven approach to shape and innovate products and services.

Define what design excellence means for the enterprise and what it entails.

Provide creative leadership for relevant design decisions.

### ASPECTS

Develop  
**Design Principles**

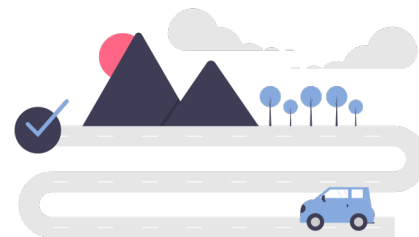
Define  
**Design Language**

Advocate  
**User Perspective**

Promote  
**End-to-End Experience**

Drive  
**Innovation**

Provide  
**Creative Direction**



# THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

## Key Dimensions in Detail



### OPERATIONS

#### Leadership Mission

Define clear organizational structures, processes, and tools to support and manage the delivery of day-to-day design work.

Enable creativity and ensure the health and stability of the team by empowering designers to focus on their craft

### ASPECTS

Define  
**Organizational Structure**

Define  
**Design Workflow**

Manage  
**Work Streams**

Ensure  
**Coherence & Quality**

Define  
**Work Environment**

Enable  
**Knowledge Exchange**





# THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Key Dimensions in Detail



## TEAM

### Leadership Mission

Build and manage the design team, fostering motivation and growth among all members.

Promote an inspiring team culture and serve as a supportive leader that the team can trust.

Make strategic hiring decisions, ensure smooth onboarding, and define clear career paths.

## ASPECTS

Build and Scale  
**Design Team**

Manage  
**Recruiting & Onboarding**

Develop  
**Design Team Culture**

Provide  
**Feedback & Guidance**

Foster  
**Talent Growth**

Advance  
**Leadership Skills**



# THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

## Key Dimensions in Detail



### ENTERPRISE

#### Leadership Mission

Align the design team with other business functions and stakeholders.

Establish a design-led culture and advocate for the capabilities of the design team.

Represent the design team both internally and externally.

### ASPECTS

Align with  
**Business Strategy**

Build  
**Stakeholder Alliances**

Advocate  
**Design-Led Approach**

Promote  
**Design Capabilities**

Support  
**Enterprise Challenges**

Build  
**Design Reputation**

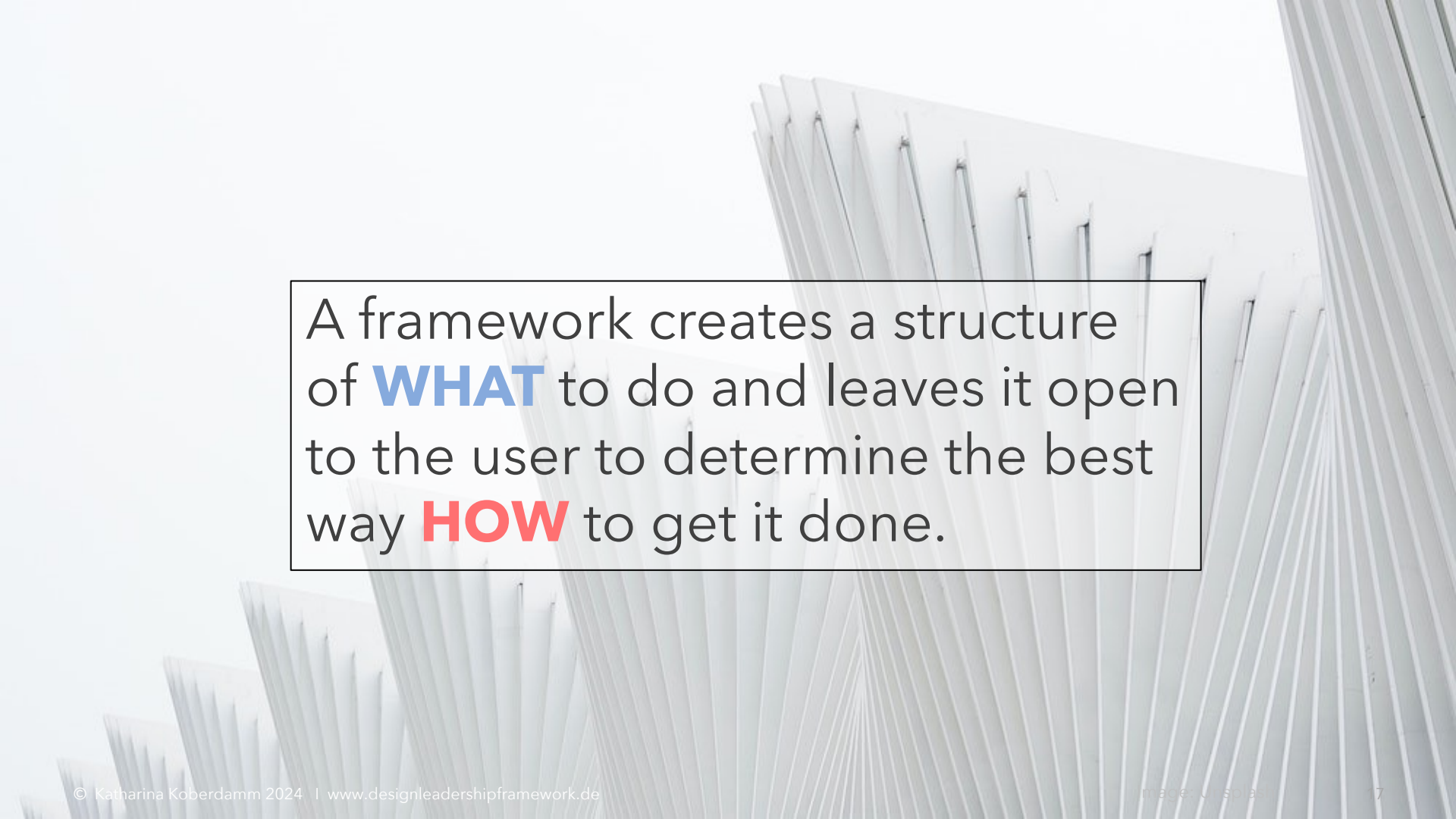


# THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Essential Aspects for Leading Design and Building Design Capability

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A framework creates a structure  
of **WHAT** to do and leaves it open  
to the user to determine the best  
way **HOW** to get it done.

# Framework Application

# Applying the Design Leadership Framework



**Education & Guide**



**Team Assessment**



**Strategy Development**



**Role Definition**

# Education & Guide

„I can use the framework as a **cheat sheet** to see all relevant leadership tasks.“

„I use the framework for my design team leads to discuss their **personal development**.“

„I've been struggling to bring some structure to my team. I think this framework will provide clarity and an approach!“

„I prepared for my new job as a design leader using the framework as a **structure to guide** me.“

# Team Assessment

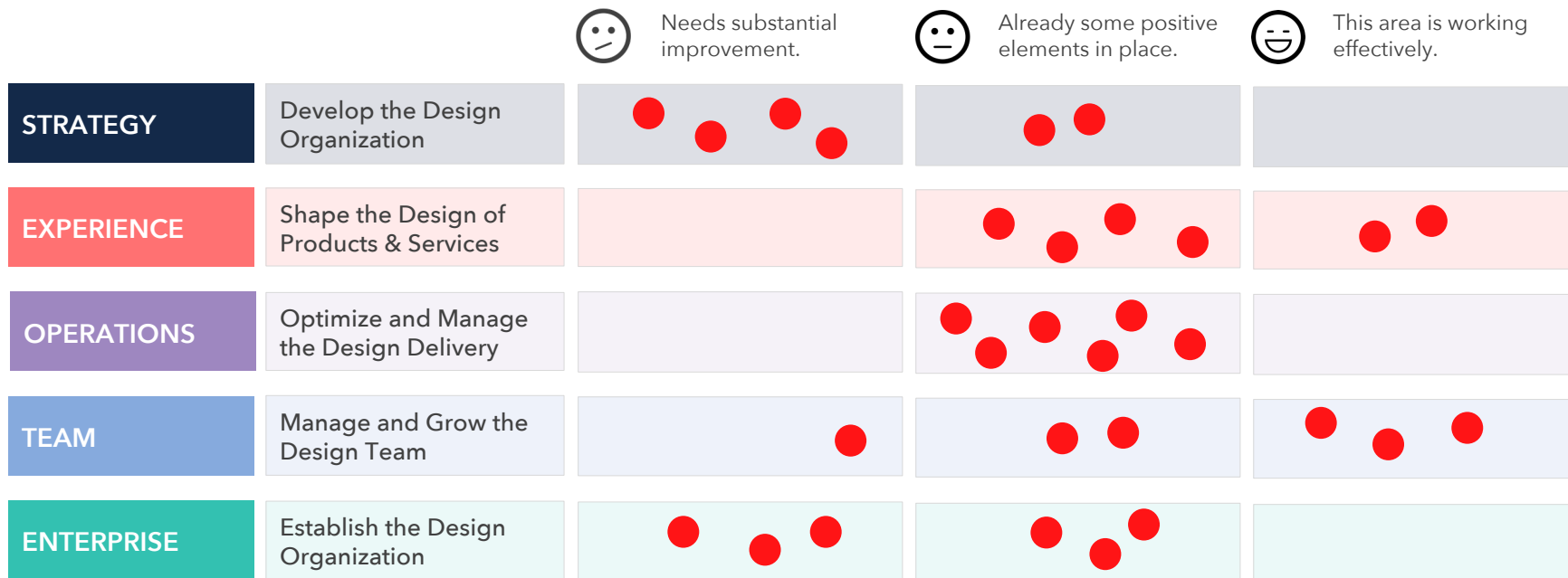
## Goal: Assessing the current state of the team and the leadership

- Which areas of design leadership are we doing well?
- Which areas are working not so well?
- What are our biggest pain points?
- Do we have blind spots?



# THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

How well is your design team, including its leadership, currently positioned in each area?





# THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Essential Aspects for Leading Design and Building Design Capability

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# Detailed Assessment of Design Organization

- Which topics are working well and which need attention? Which are not relevant for you?
- Can be done alone or as a team activity or discussion.
- Use these icons to indicate for each aspect:



working well



needs attention






not relevant

STRATEGY	EXPERIENCE	OPERATIONS	TEAM	ENTERPRISE
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(C) The Design Leadership Framework: [www.designleadershipframework.de](http://www.designleadershipframework.de)

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## Collecting pain points and issues



# Collecting pain points and issues



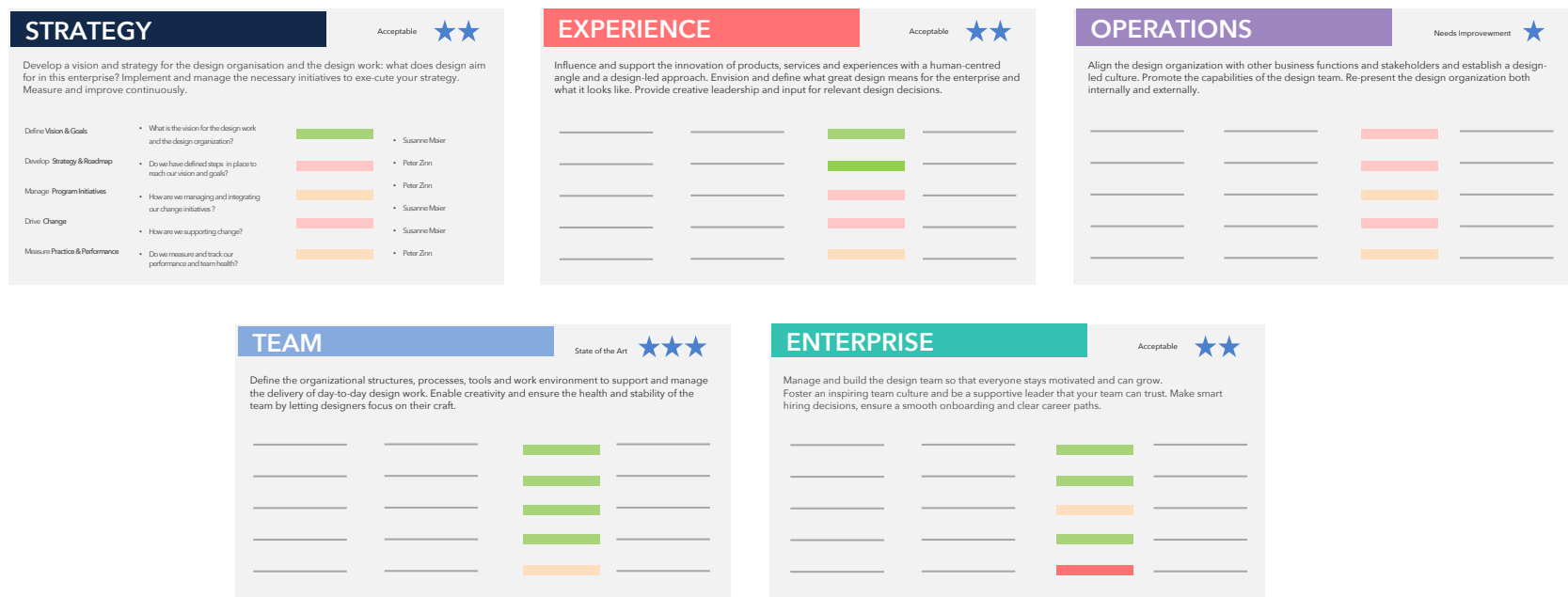
# Detailed Documentation of Team Assessment

<div> <div>EXPERIENCE</div> <div>Influence and support the innovation of products, services and experiences with a human-centered angle and a design-led approach. Envision and define what great design means for the enterprise and what it looks like. Provide creative leadership and input for relevant design decisions.</div> </div>										
PLAN										
EXPERIENCE	CURRENT STATUS	2023 ACHIEVED	CHALLENGES	GOAL SCENARIO	CURRENT WORK	IDEAS	JAN - MAR	APR - JUN	JUN - AUG	SEP - DEC
Develop Principles				Defined design principles that describe on a general level, what the guiding values and guidelines are for design						
Define Design Language				Define the design language that describes the general foundations and re-usable components and patterns to use when creating design solutions.						
Advocate User Perspective				Be the advocate for human understanding and empathy within product development and when engaging with clients.						
Promote Overall Experience				Support a holistic and strategic approach on improving the experience of products and services.						
Drive Innovation				Drive the innovation of products, services and customer experiences forward with a human-centered perspective and a design-led approach.						
Provide Creative Guidance				Provide creative leadership and direction by overseeing and guiding the outcomes of design work across multiple teams, products and initiatives.						

Example Application by James Mole McConnell

# Detailed Documentation of Team Assessment

## Design Leadership Dashboard

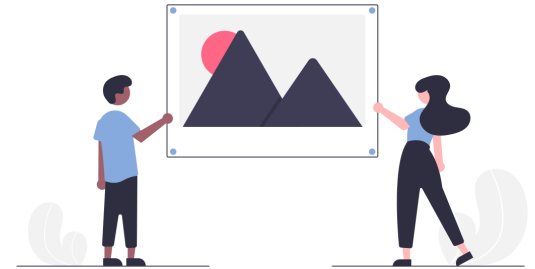




# Strategy Development

## Goal: Develop a strategy and roadmap for developing the design team and design organisation

- What is our shared vision for the design team?
- What topics and initiatives should we focus on?
- What is our plan for implementing change?



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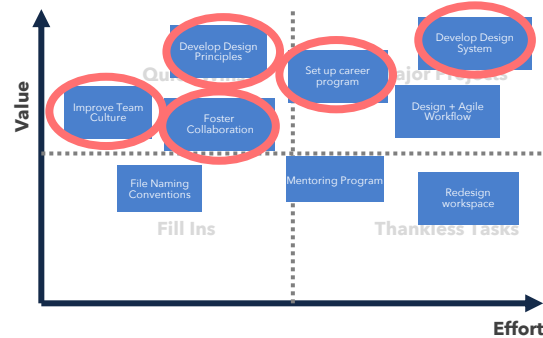
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# From ideas to roadmap and design program

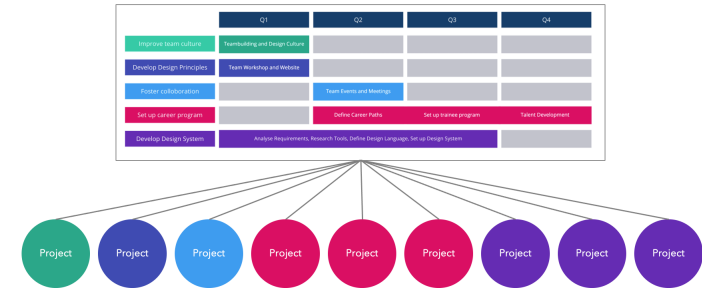
## Gather possible initiatives



## Discuss and prioritise



## Develop roadmap and define internal projects

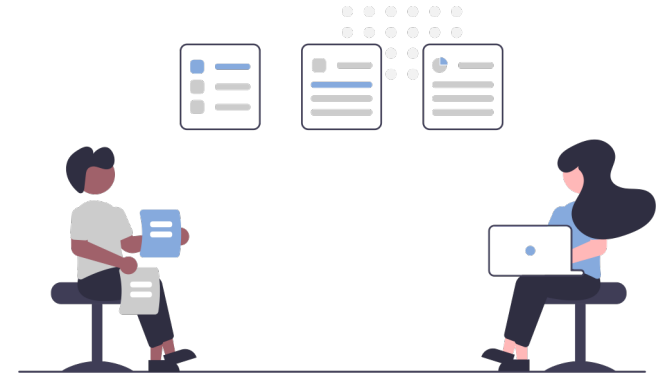


More details in next input talk

# Role Definition

**Goal: Clarify roles and responsibilities in your design leadership team.**

- Which role or person is in charge of a topic?
- Which role or person needs to contribute to a topic?
- What are possible partners from other business functions?



## Example: Mapping roles to leadership areas

STRATEGY	EXPERIENCE	OPERATIONS	TEAM	ENTERPRISE
Assess Current Situation	Develop Design Principles	Define Organizational Structure	Build and Scale Design Team	Align with Business Strategy
Define Vision & Goals	Define Design Language	Define Design Principles	Manage Recruiting & Onboarding	Build Stakeholder Alliances
<b>Head of Design</b>	<b>Creative Director</b>	<b>Head of Design</b>	<b>Design Team Leads</b>	<b>Head of Design</b>
Develop Strategy & Roadmap	Advocate User Perspective	Manage Work Streams	Develop Design Team Culture	Advocate Design Approach
<b>Design Program Manager</b>	<b>Principal Designers</b>	<b>Design Operations Manager</b>	Provide Feedback & Guidance	Provide Design Capabilities
Drive Program Initiatives	Promote End-to-End Experience	Ensure Coherence & Quality	Foster Talent Growth	Support Enterprise Challenges
Measure Practice & Performance	Provide Creative Direction	Enable Knowledge Exchange	Advance Leadership Skills	Build Design Reputation

# Example: Mapping business partners to leadership areas

STRATEGY	EXPERIENCE	OPERATIONS	TEAM	ENTERPRISE
Assess Current Situation	Develop Product Design Principles	Define Organizational Structure	Build and Scale Design Team	Align with Business Strategy
<b>Strategic Management</b>	<b>Marketing</b>	<b>Project Management Office (PMO)</b>	Manage Recruiting & Onboarding	<b>Strategic Management</b>
Develop Strategy & Roadmap	Advocate Branding User Perspective	Manage IT & Admin	Develop Human Resources Team Culture	Align with Design-Led Approach
<b>Change Management</b>	<b>Content</b>	Ensure Legal & Quality	Provide Feedback & Guidance	<b>Product Development</b>
Manage Program	Drive Innovation	Define Office Environment	Foster Talent Growth	Support Enterprise Challenges
<b>Program Management</b>	<b>Innovation Management</b>	<b>Office Management</b>	Advance Leadership Skills	Build Design Reputation
Measure Practice & Performance	Provide Creative Direction	Enable Knowledge Exchange		



# Example: Mapping Tasks and Roles / People

Allocate and map your existing or planned Design Leadership Roles or Team Members to the leadership areas and activities.  
Fill the circles with Role Abbreviations or Team Initials. Leave out or add circles as needed. You can use color codes for easier mapping.

STRATEGY	EXPERIENCE	OPERATIONS	TEAM	ENTERPRISE
Assess Current Situation HD DM CD DO	Develop Design Principles CD PD HD DM	Define Organizational Structure ○ ○ ○	Build and Scale Design Team ○ ○ ○	Align with Business Strategy ○ ○ ○
Define Vision & Goals HD DM CD DO	Define Design Language CD PD	Define Design Workflow ○ ○ ○	Manage Recruiting & Onboarding ○ ○ ○	Build Stakeholder Alliances ○ ○ ○
Develop Strategy & Roadmap HD DM CD DO	Advocate User Perspective HD CD CX UR	Manage Work Streams ○ ○ ○	Develop Design Team Culture ○ ○ ○	Advocate Design-Led Approach ○ ○ ○
Drive Change HD PM	Promote End-to-End Experience HD CD MA CX	Ensure Design Coherence ○ ○ ○	Provide Feedback & Guidance ○ ○ ○	Promote Design Capabilities ○ ○ ○
Manage Program Initiatives HD	Drive Innovation HD CD	Define Work Environment ○ ○ ○	Foster Talent Growth ○ ○ ○	Support Enterprise Challenges ○ ○ ○
Measure Practice & Performance HD	Provide Creative Direction CD PD	Enable Knowledge Exchange ○ ○ ○	Advance Leadership Skills ○ ○ ○	Build Design Reputation ○ ○ ○

Examples for Leadership Roles, Contributors and Stakeholders



Head of Design, Creative Director, Design Director, Design Manager, Design Operations Manager, Design Program Manager, Principal Designer, User Research, User Experience, User Interface, Product Owner, Project Manager, Marketing, Human Resources...

The Design Leadership Framework: [www.designleadershipframework.de](http://www.designleadershipframework.de)

# Example Role Description

## After the role workshop

- create role descriptions or job descriptions
- using the framework aspects as a basis
- add your individual points relevant to your org



### **Design Operations Manager**

#### **Responsible for**

- Defining and improving the Design Workflow and facilitating Collaboration within product teams
- Defining the Work Environment (physical and digital, incl. tools)
- Ensuring Design Coherence (incl. Design System)
- Enabling Knowledge Management in the Design Team
- Assure Quality and Compliance of delivered designs

#### **Contributing to**

- Creating the vision & strategy for the design team
- Setting up a design program
- Building Design Culture in the enterprise
- Developing a positive team culture
- Processes for Staffing, Recruiting and Talent Growth

# **Activity**

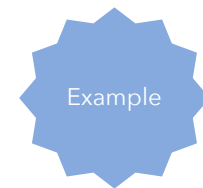
## Team Assessment

# THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

How well is your design team, including its leadership, currently positioned in each area?

		 Needs substantial improvement.	 Already some positive elements in place.	 This area is working effectively.
<b>STRATEGY</b>	Develop the design organization through strategic initiatives and continuous improvement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>EXPERIENCE</b>	Drive the evolution and innovation of products and services through a design-led approach.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>OPERATIONS</b>	Establish efficient structures, processes, and tools for a seamless design delivery.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>TEAM</b>	Build and manage the design team, fostering motivation and growth among all members.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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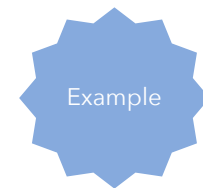


# THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Take a closer look at the areas you identified as needing improvement.

Check all aspects that require attention. Then, prioritize the 3 most important aspects, for example, by circling them.

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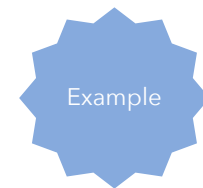


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# Describe your selected challenge

Select one of your prioritized framework aspects and describe it in more detail here.

## Selected Aspect

Which aspect of the framework do you want to work on

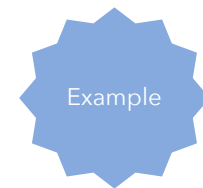
## Current Challenge

Describe your current challenge and pain points in a few bullet points

## How Might We

Frame your challenge in a concise How Might We format

# Describe your selected challenge



Select one of your prioritized framework aspects and describe it in more detail here.

## Selected Aspect

Which aspect of the framework do you want to work on  
*Develop Design Team Culture*

## Current Challenge

Describe your current challenge and pain points in a few bullet points

*Designers are distributed in product teams*  
*Regular exchange or feedback from design peers is missing*  
*Remote work makes in-person socialising rituals difficult*  
*Designers feel a bit isolated and lack a shared team culture*

## How might we

Frame your challenge in a concise How might we format

*How might we improve team culture and exchange among designers in a setting that is highly distributed and remote.*

# **Input Talk**

Design Leader's Strategy Cycle

# Design Team Strategy

## Focus

- Designer's **ways of working** and **processes**
- Designer's **organisational structures** and **culture**
- Designer's **tools and workplace**

## Goal

- Improve **Team Health** and **Design Outcomes**
- Reducing **issues** or **inefficiencies**



# THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Essential Aspects for Leading Design and Building Design Capability

STRATEGY	EXPERIENCE	OPERATIONS	TEAM	ENTERPRISE
Assess Current Situation	Develop Design Principles	Define Organizational Structure	Build and Scale Design Team	Align with Business Strategy
Define Vision & Goals	Define Design Language	Define Design Workflow	Manage Recruiting & Onboarding	Build Stakeholder Alliances
Develop Strategy & Roadmap	Advocate User Requirements	Manage Design Work Streams	Develop Design Team Culture	Advocate Design Leadership
Drive Change	Promote End-to-End Experience	Ensure Coherence & Quality	Provide Feedback & Guidance	Promote Design Capabilities
Manage Program Initiatives	Drive Innovation	Define Work Environment	Foster Talent Growth	Support Enterprise Challenges
Measure Practice & Performance	Provide Creative Direction	Enable Knowledge Exchange	Advance Leadership Skills	Build Design Reputation

The Strategy Activities detail HOW you are going to achieve excellence in the other four key areas of Design Leadership

# A strategic approach to organizational development

Assess  
Current  
Situation

Define  
Vision &  
Goals

Develop  
Strategy &  
Roadmap

Drive  
Change

Manage  
Program  
Initiatives

Measure  
Practice &  
Performance

Develop Team Strategy

Implement Team Strategy

# Assess Current Situation

Honest look at the state of your team

Pain points, issues and influencing factors

Basis for working on the right challenges later on

# Define Vision & Goals

The future state  
you want to reach  
as a team

A high-level idea  
of what you want  
to achieve

Unifies the team  
and connects  
leadership



# Develop Strategy & Roadmap



The strategy is the plan  
how the vision and goals will be reached  
by your initiatives and resources.

# Develop Strategy & Roadmap

A roadmap  
towards the future  
state

Planned design  
program  
initiatives

A clear direction  
for leadership and  
team

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Improve team culture	Teambuilding and Design Culture			
Develop Design Principles	Team Workshop and Website			
Foster collaboration		Team Events and Meetings		
Set up career program		Define Career Paths	Set up trainee program	Talent Development
Develop Design System	Analyse Requirements, Research Tools, Define Design Language, Set up Design System			



# Drive Change

**People react very sensitive to  
organizational change.**

**Loosing status**

**Loosing relationships**

**Leaving comfort zone**



# Drive Change

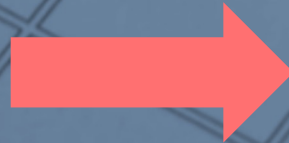
Offer guidance  
through a change  
process

Communicate  
transparently and  
offer support

Let team  
participate to  
increase adoption  
and success

# Manage Program Initiatives

Strategy and  
Roadmap

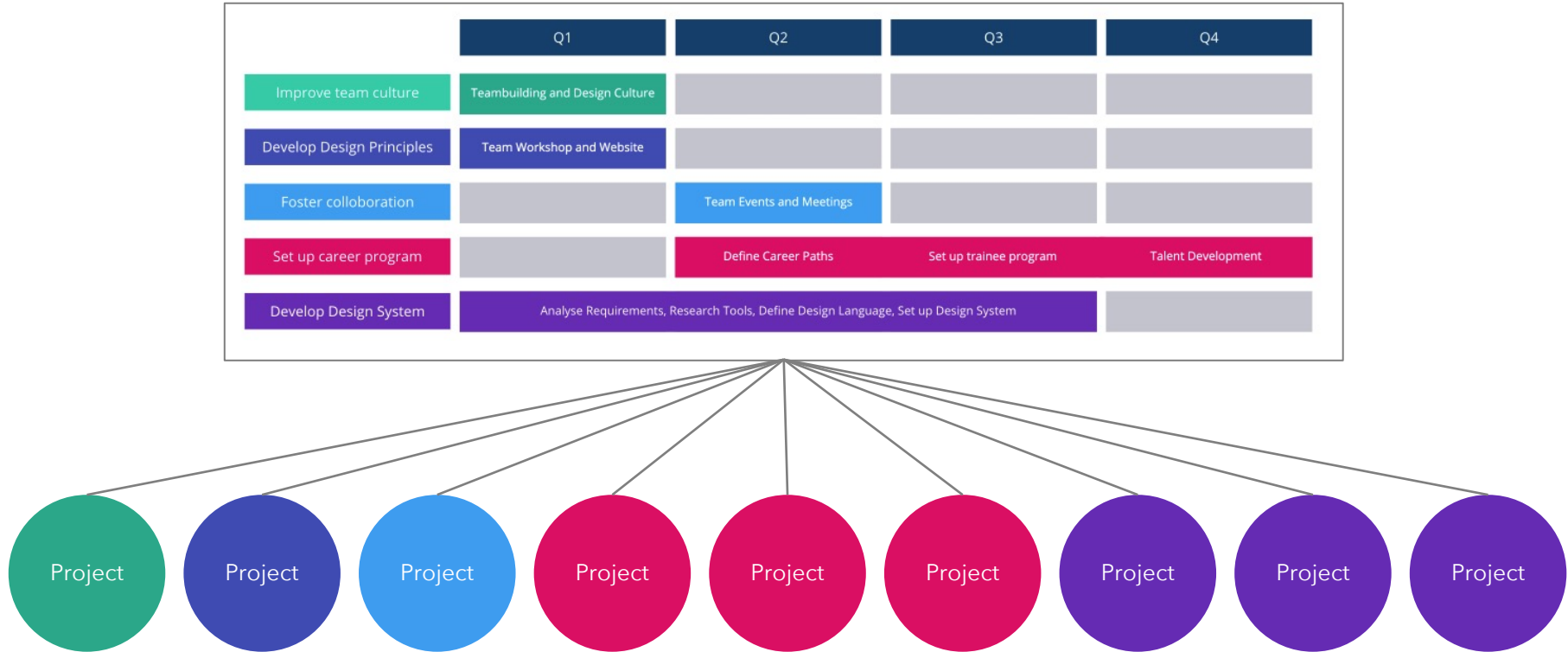


**Design Program**

Internal Project

Internal Project

Internal Project



# Manage Program Initiatives

Set up and kick-off  
internal project

Conceptualise  
Experiment  
Implement

Effectively execute  
the strategy

# Measure Practice & Performance

Understand the  
impact of changes

Identify new issues  
and pain points

Regularly check in  
with the team and  
share learnings

# A strategic approach to organizational development

Assess  
Current  
Situation

Define  
Vision &  
Goals

Develop  
Strategy &  
Roadmap

Drive  
Change

Manage  
Program  
Initiatives

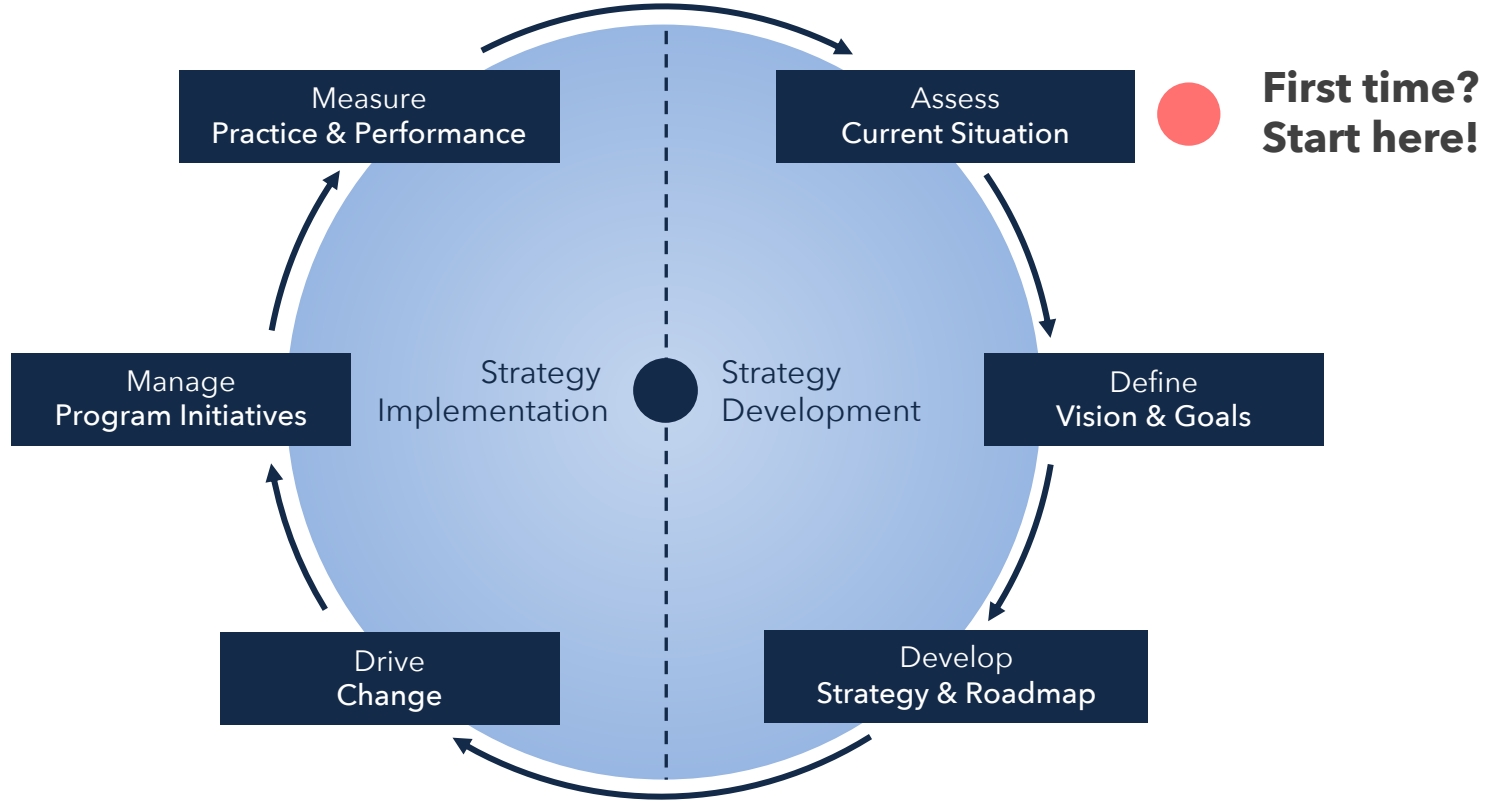
Measure  
Practice &  
Performance

Develop Team Strategy

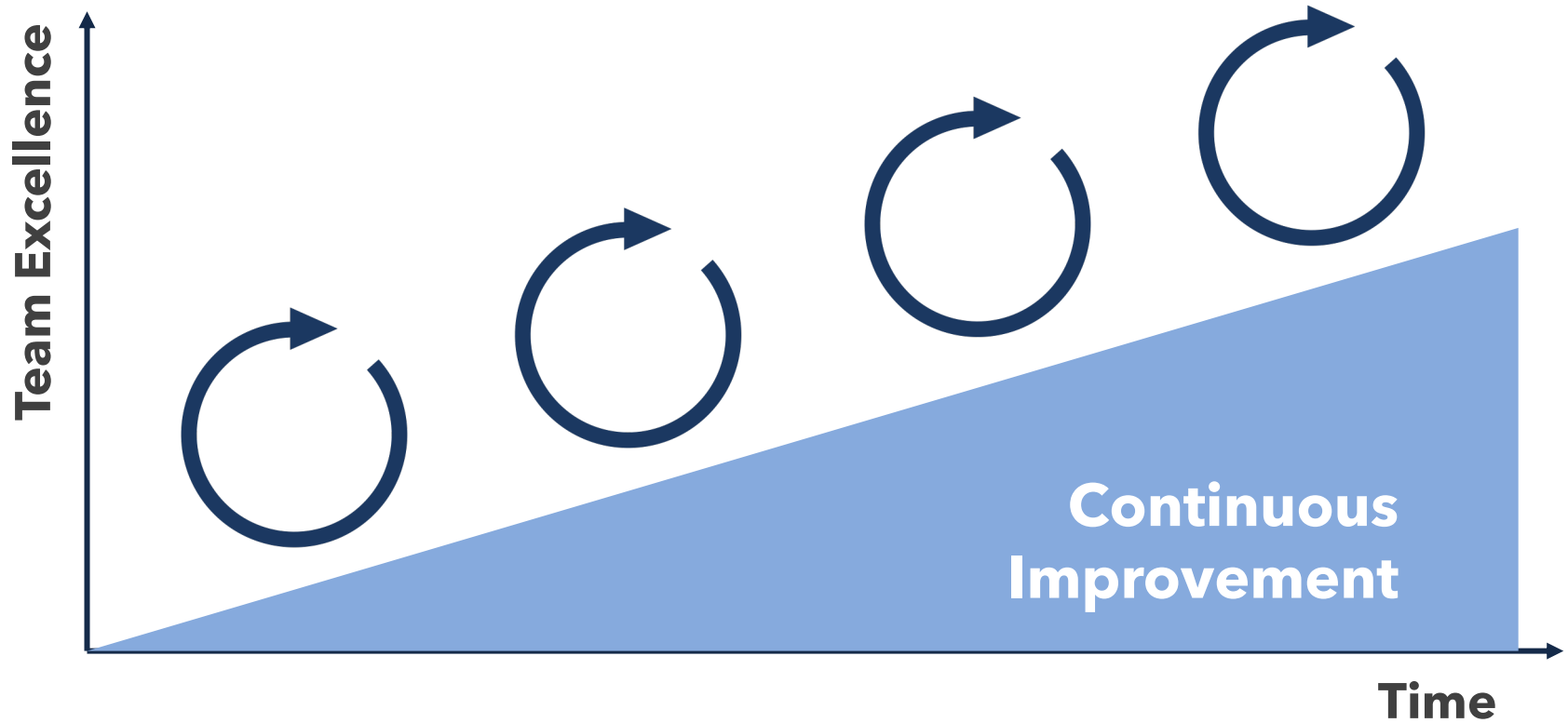
Implement Team Strategy



# Strategy Cycle



# Upward Spiral





# **Activity**

## Strategy Template

# Strategy Template

How might we

## What we want to achieve

Describe the positive outcomes of your initiative

## First Ideas

Describe possible ideas and solutions for your challenge

## First Steps

Define a few first steps to drive the initiative forward

## Possible Barriers

Identify possible barriers for implementing your ideas

# Strategy Template

How might we *improve team culture and exchange among designers in a setting that is highly distributed and remote.*

## What we want to achieve

Describe the positive outcomes of your initiative

- *Build a design team identity and culture*
- *Increase motivation and team relationships*
- *Increase design quality through peer feedback*

## First Ideas

Describe possible ideas and solutions for your challenge

- *Monthly team building event with a mix of socialising and sharing stories from project work*
- *Weekly Team Lunch via Zoom, e.g. trying out a recipe*
- *Pair Designing and Design Critique Sessions*

## First Steps

Define a few first steps to drive the initiative forward

- *Schedule and prepare a team workshop to gather and discuss ideas*
- *Set up internal project and assign responsibilities within team*
- *Inform stakeholders and apply for budget if necessary.*

## Possible Barriers

Identify possible barriers for implementing your ideas

- *Conflicts of interest between design team and product teams where designers work in*
- *Conflict with Scrum Organisation*
- *Not enough interest or participation in the team*
- *Not enough time in daily business*

Example

# Wrap Up

## Approach

**Strategic**  
**Structured**  
**Proactive**

# Every leader needs to find their own style and needs to build their own toolset.



- Take with you what inspires you
- Try out what fits into your team and organisation

# Learn more about the framework

Design Leadership Framework

HOMEEVENTS • COACHINGRESOURCESBOOKQ

Design Leadership Framework

**Welcome!** I'm Katharina Koberdamm, design consultant and university lecturer with over 15 years of experience in the industry. I've developed the Design Leadership Framework, a management tool that supports design leaders in building strong and successful design teams.

My mission is to help companies establish a design-led approach and empower design leaders like you. On this website you can learn more about the Design Leadership Framework, access materials and explore the services I provide to support your journey in design leadership.



Discover the Framework

The Design Leadership Framework offers a concise overview of the most important aspects to look into when leading and managing a design team. It serves as a practical compass for design leaders in a digital era when design needs to be both a driver of innovation as well as efficient support for product development. Click on images to expand view.

THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

The Five Key Dimensions of Design Leadership

STRATEGY

Develop a vision and strategy for the design team and the design work. Manage and execute the strategy initiatives to implement your design effectively. Continuously measure and improve the design practice and design outcomes.

EXPERIENCE

Promote a human-centered perspective and design-driven approach to shape and create products and services. Define what design excellence means for the enterprise and what it entails. Provide creative leadership for relevant design decisions.

OPERATIONS

Define clear organizational structures, processes and tools to support and manage the delivery of day-to-day design work. Foster creativity and ensure the health and stability of the team by empowering designers to focus on their craft.

ENTERPRISE

Align the design team with other business functions and stakeholders. Establish a designed culture and advocate for the capabilities of the design team. Represent the design team both internally and externally.

TEAM

Build and manage the design team, fostering motivation and growth among all members. Promote an inspiring team culture and serve as a supportive leader that the team can trust. Make strategic hiring decisions, ensure smooth onboarding, and define clear career paths.



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Book planned


DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR LEADING DESIGN TEAMS AND BUILDING THE DESIGN CAPABILITY.

KATHARINA KOBERDAMM

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# 1:1 Remote Coaching

## My offering

- Work with an experienced coach and mentor for all your topics around design leadership
- Discuss your individual challenges and topics
- Receive feedback, expert input and best practice recommendations
- Work on your professional development



**Please ask about my affordable coaching packages.**



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Design Leadern austauschen.



[www.designleadershipframework.de](http://www.designleadershipframework.de)

Katharina Koberdamm | Design Consultant

Sascha Mahlke | Design Leader

# Thank you



**Katharina Koberdamm**

Design Leadership Consultant

[LinkedIn](#)

## **Website**

[designleadershipframework.com](https://designleadershipframework.com)

## **My services**

- Leadership Coaching
- Team Consulting
- Training Sessions and Talks
- Leadership Events

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