Design Leadership Framework
Overview and Guide

www.**designleadershipframework**.de

THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Table of Contents

Summary

The Design Leadership Framework is a research project by Katharina Koberdamm. It aims to address the question:

What are the essential topics that design leaders must focus on when leading design teams and developing design capability?

The framework was developed through extensive periods of literature research, followed by synthesizing the findings and application with clients and practitioners. It is regularly updated and refined.

Since its initial introduction in 2018, the Design Leadership Framework has been embraced by numerous design leaders and teams worldwide.

This document provides a concise overview and guide to the framework's areas and aspects.

Contents

THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

The Five Key Dimensions of Design Leadership

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 necessary initiatives to implement your strategy effectively. Continuously measure and improve the design practice and design outcomes.

EXPERIENCE

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.

ENTERPRISE

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.

OPERATIONS

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

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.

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 Perspective**	Manage **Work Streams**	Develop **Design Team Culture**	Advocate **Design-Led Approach**
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 DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

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.

ASPECT	SHORT SUMMARY
Assess Current Situation	Understand and synthesize the current challenges, opportunities, and influencing factors for your design strategy.
Define Vision & Goals	Develop a vision and long-term goals that can guide the design work, unify the design team, and connect leadership activities.
Develop Strategy & Roadmap	Develop a strategy that will work towards bringing the vision to life and achieving the desired goals for the design organization.
Drive Change	Prepare and align the design team for upcoming changes, particularly those related to organizational structures or processes.
Manage Program Initiatives	Set up and oversee the design program consisting of a series of interconnected projects and initiatives aimed at implementing your strategy.
Measure Practice & Performance	Measure the impact of your strategic initiatives and changes, and establish a system for regularly evaluating the overall health of the team and the quality of the design practice.

THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

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.

ASPECT	SHORT SUMMARY
Develop Design Principles	Develop and establish design principles that define the core values and guidelines for design within your team and organization.
Define Design Language	Define a design language that outlines the visual and interactive elements, components, and patterns that are to be used consistently across a product or brand.
Advocate User Perspective	Be an advocate for the user perspective and empathy in the design process within product development and the enterprise.
Promote End-to-End Experience	Support a holistic and strategic approach to improving the customer experience across the entire journey with the organization's products and services.
Drive Innovation	Establish design methodology and a design-led approach as key contributors to product innovation and overall innovation within the enterprise.
Provide Creative Direction	Provide creative leadership and direction by overseeing and guiding the design outcomes across multiple teams, products, and initiatives

THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

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

ASPECT	SHORT SUMMARY
Define Organizational Structure	Outline the organizational structure for your design team, including team setup, roles, and reporting hierarchies. Describe how the team is embedded within the wider organization.
Define Design Workflow	Define the ideal design process, including the steps involved, methods utilized, and expected outputs. Establish regular opportunities for collaborative design and peer-to-peer problem-solving.
Define Work Environment	Set up the physical workspace and the digital tools and infrastructure necessary for the design team to effectively perform their work.
Manage Work Streams	Set up the operational processes for staffing and resource allocation. Define the ways of working for managing, and tracking the design work and design projects.
Ensure Coherence & Quality	Ensure that designers and other relevant roles have access to the necessary resources for creating consistent and coherent design solutions. Establish processes and criteria to guarantee that shipped designs adhere to established design principles & design language.
Enable Knowledge Exchange	Ensure that the design team has easy access to all relevant templates and documentation, along with existing research about products and users. Encourage sharing best practices, inspiring content, and lessons learned to help everyone grow and improve.

THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

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.

ASPECT	SHORT SUMMARY
Build and Scale Design Team	Build and scale the design team to meet the enterprise's requirements for staffing levels and necessary skills sets.
Develop Team Culture	Promote shared values and practices that maintain team health and happiness. Encourage a creative, and trusting team dynamic among designers within your organization.
Provide Feedback & Guidance	Regularly offer individualized feedback and support to members of your team, and check in to understand their current challenges, motivations, and goals.
Foster Talent Growth	Encourage and facilitate the professional and personal growth of your team members and help them advance in their careers as designers.
Develop Leadership Skills	Improve your leadership skills continuously by actively seeking feedback and acquiring new abilities for leading and managing your team effectively.
Manage Recruiting & Onboarding	Define clear processes for recruiting and onboarding new team members and external partners to ensure a smooth and effective integration into the design team.

THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

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.

ASPECT	SHORT SUMMARY
Align with Business Strategy	Ensure that the objectives and initiatives of the design team are aligned with the overall business strategy.
Build Stakeholder Alliances	Actively build strong relationships and alliances with relevant stakeholders and leaders from other departments and business functions
Advocate Design-Led Approach	Develop and promote design culture within the enterprise to enhance understanding of the value of design, both within and outside the design team.
Promote Design Capabilities	Ensure that the capabilities of the design team are widely understood and that all related business functions are aware of when and how to involve the team.
Support Enterprise Challenges	Establish the design team as a key contributor in solving business challenges and addressing organizational issues throughout the enterprise.
Build Design Reputation	Establish a strong reputation for your design team, both internally and externally, to increase visibility, attract talented individuals, and advance the field of design.

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.
STRATEGY	Develop the design organization through strategic initiatives and continuous improvement.	☐	☐	☐
EXPERIENCE	Drive the evolution and innovation of products and services through a design-led approach.	☐	☐	☐
OPERATIONS	Establish efficient structures, processes, and tools for a seamless design delivery.	☐	☐	☐
TEAM	Build and manage the design team, fostering motivation and growth among all members.	☐	☐	☐
ENTERPRISE	Align with multiple business stakeholders and advocate for design capabilities.	☐	☐	☐

THE DESIGN LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Which aspects of Design Leadership need to be improved? Which need more attention?

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Discover more

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