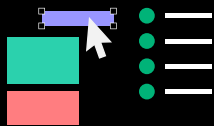# DesignOps 101

UXPin {V} merge

DesignOps 101

Design process simplified

UXPin allows you to design with fully interactive components that your devs build products with. Now, you can prototype with no room for errors and release products faster. Scale your design operations with our Merge technology!

Create perfect prototypes

Build prototypes that feel like the end product with hundreds of built-in elements and your code components.
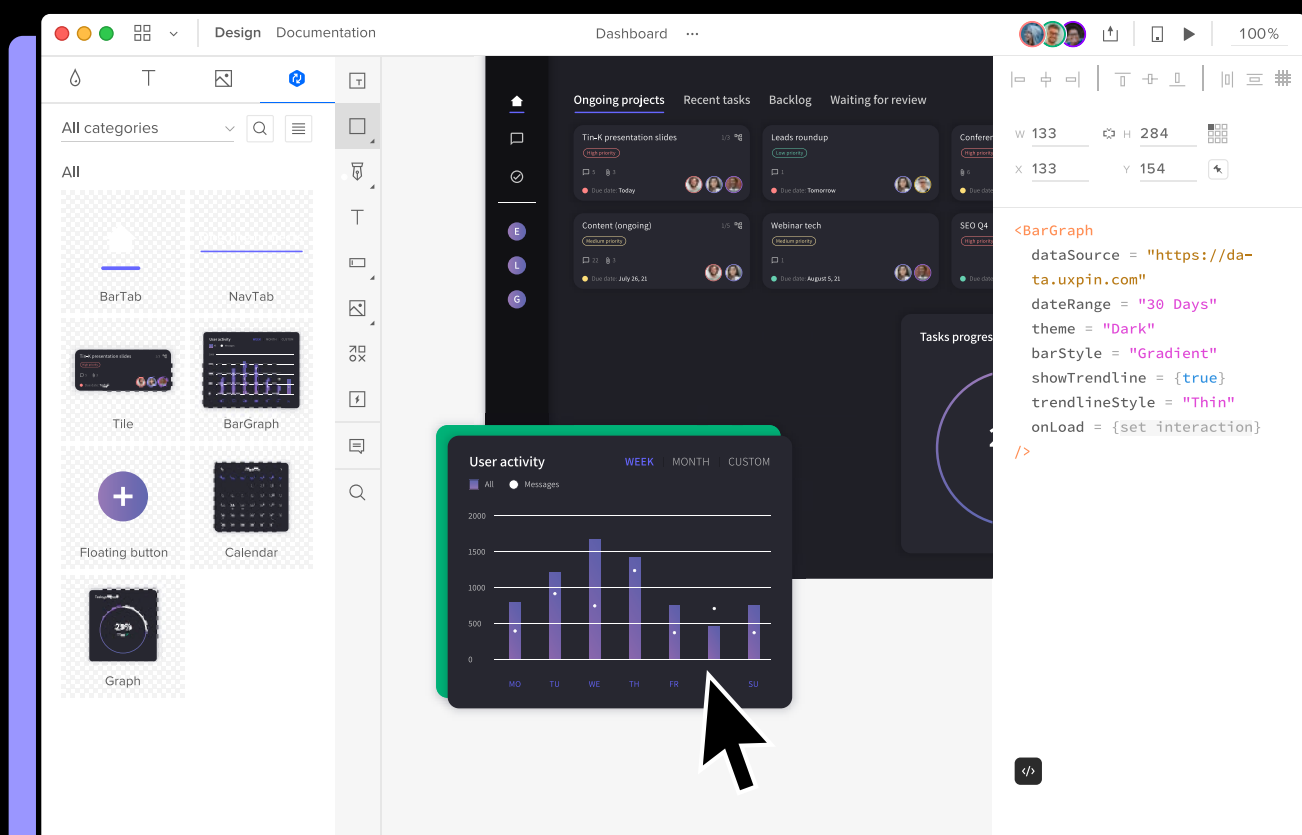
Keep full consistency

Design at scale with dynamic and reusable design systems. Use interactive UI components and clear documentation.

Build with DesignOps in mind

Design with UI code components and remove product drift during handoff. Prototype even 8x faster.

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WHAT IS DESIGNOPS?

01

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Design Operations focuses on the *how* so that design can focus on the *what*. It is the design discipline that owns the intentional operationalizing, optimizing and scaling of design.

We design experiences, systems, and tools for design teams in the same way designers design for customers.

Design Operations creates the environment for designers to do their best work. We are the secret sauce of design organizations.

from **Rachel Posman**'s article,
Director, UX Operations,
Salesforce

Design Operations is one of the emerging buzzwords in the creative industry. It was coined by Dave Malouf – design expert that helped raise the importance of this design area. As the industry has realized the importance of DesignOps, it is gaining increasingly more popularity.

However, still DesignOps is a fairly new discipline – it's not surprising that you might ask "what is DesignOps?"

Don't worry if you are in the design industry and don't know. This guide will help you learn everything you need to know about DesignOps, including its importance, work principles, how to get started, and tools for success in later chapters.

So back to that core question: **What is DesignOps**?

While most designers don't want to get caught up in or talk about processes and procedures, DesignOps is the glue that connects how the work is done to what matters when it comes to creative consistency and user experience.

Kristin Skinner described it like this at the 2017 DesignOps Summit:

Design Operations focuses on the health of the practice, the people, and the projects.

INTRO TO DESIGNOPS

DesignOps principles apply to almost anyone involved in design, but particularly UX designers and product team members because of an ever-growing need to keep doing more. Websites and all digital products are getting larger and more complex every day; having a way to manage processes and measures of success can make jobs a lot more manageable.

You can break design operations down into three root pillars that help you on the path toward meeting strategic and tactical goals. Strategic goals are for the overall project while tactical goals are measurable milestones to help you get there.

DesignOps pillars and strategic goals might look like this:

1 **Progress** – completing projects efficiently.

2 **Process** – achieving goals efficiently.

3 **People** – working together efficiently.

Then you can take that one step further and add actionable, tactical items to each of the pillars that you can use to measure project success along the way.
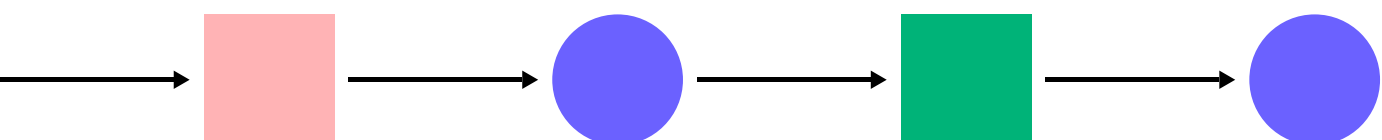
By creating some processes and measurable milestones within a project, it's easier to manage the flow of design work as it moves through your organization.

The discipline is a tool to help address and facilitate change for teams, workflows, and improve overall quality of projects. It's usable and functional for anyone directly or indirectly involved with a design team.

And here's why it is so important – and is a growing field: DesignOps allows you to harness design thinking and user centered design concepts to create better processes for projects and scale them. (It's a kickstarter for design work!)

DESIGNOPS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A recent search showed that there were more than 13,000 open "DesignOps" job openings on Linkedin in the United States alone.

That means one core thing – if you are in the design industry, a DesignOps role may be in your future or may be the title of your future manager.

Design Operations roles and responsibilities can vary from company to company, but they often have three focus areas in common:

1 **Projects**: DesignOps roles require planning, resourcing, financial, logistics, and optimization skills.

2 **Process**: DesignOps roles are rooted in the tools, systems, methodologies, strategy, and scale of their business and clients.

3 **People**: DesignOps roles are interconnected with the transformation, education, culture, partnership, and politics surrounding the people they manage and come in day-to-day contact with.

Then there's the whole second level of DesignOps jobs and responsibilities. _Org Design for Design Orgs_ outlines four levels of design operations roles and responsibilities. These include a lot of job titles that don't mention "DesignOps" per se and include everything from junior product designs to content strategists to UX researchers to lead designers. (Just think of how many jobs are now available in the wider field.)

DesignOps managers aren't necessary within every organization, but the larger the team and the more likely that team is to scale, makes these roles more important. Start with the members of your team who already show some of the core skills associated with DesignOps leadership to begin implementing this way of thinking about problems and solutions into your company culture.

DESIGNOPS CAN RESOLVE DESIGN AND BUSINESS CHALLENGES

The reason DesignOps is beginning to become the core of UX and website design companies is because it solves creative and business challenges.

The Nielsen Norman Group defines these solutions as part of a greater overall DesignOps landscape. Each of these areas addresses challenges that are almost universal in design:

1 **How we work together**: Organize teams, collaborate, humanize environments and gatherings for more efficient work

2 **How we get work done**: Standardize processes, harmonize so there's a shared understanding of design intelligence, and prioritize projects

3 **How our work creates impact**: Measure work to create accountability, socialize as a tool to educate others on the value of design, and enable use of design thinking and related activities.

DESIGNOPS VS. DEVOPS

Sometimes, DesignOps gets confused with the similar DevOps, but these are very different roles within a design or product team.

While we've examined what DesignOps is here, it is maybe even more important to note that it is not the same as DevOps. DesignOps is a relatively new field that integrates design best practices into the larger scope of business strategy and processes.

DevOps is much more technical. It is the methodology for creating and scaling information technology systems and organizations. While DesignOps happens on the visual and creative side, DevOps is much more of a technical development function.

They both relate to the function of scale within a business and are both decision-making roles. The core difference is in the actual function and focus of those conversations about the bigger picture.

DesignOps and DevOps teams (and individuals) are vitally important to the overall success of product design teams. This includes everything from website or app design to SaaS or IoT companies. They are similar in that both roles work toward solving the same base challenges − figuring out how to grow and scale companies.

LOOKING AHEAD

DesignOps is an extension of design thinking. So even if you are new to the terminology, you may already be familiar with best practices and how it advances UX work.

At the core of the design industry is an understanding that the creating can be just as important as the experience itself. Ops creates a focus on the **how** of design work so that designers can put more time into the **what**.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DESIGNOPS

- **Challenges and Solutions**

- **Seamless Collaboration**

- **Ability to Scale the Design Process**

- **Managing Needs**

- **Looking Ahead**

02

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Design organizations cannot effectively scale without strategic operational leaders experienced at solving ambiguous problems, anticipating evolving needs, navigating the changing tides of complex organizations and creating solutions that adapt to changing technology, culture and pace.

Designers also design better products when they are happy, energized, fulfilled, supported and inspired.

written by **Rachel Posman,**
Director, UX Operations,
Salesforce

The importance of DesignOps might be best described by one of the pioneers in the field, <u>Alana Washington</u>, Uber's Head of Shipping Experience Design:

The true strength of Design Operation practitioners is that they parachute in and collect sentiment and figure out the biggest pain points challenging organizations and impeding progress.

Sometimes that pain is located in product teams that then trickles down to design. Other times it's understanding the value of design and evangelizing that to leadership. Strong Design Ops folks have the savvy and experience to influence for the better.

Let that last bit sink in for a moment. DesignOps is more than just processes to create efficiencies; it's about creating something better.

And as we grow we just want to make sure that the design system scales accordingly and that designers get what they need basically for their projects.

Rasha Abdou,
Product Experience Design Lead,
Johnson & Johnson
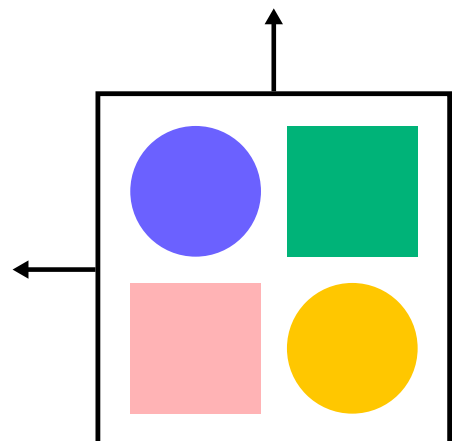
CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

At the core DesignOps are the challenges that helped create the processes and methodology behind it. And creating solutions to ensure scalability.

Design operations exists to help mitigate challenges that design teams face:

- **Increasing volume of work and demand on the time of design teams**

- **Working in isolation or having siloed workflows or procedures**

- **Missing design tools that could help design teams work smarter**

- **Misunderstanding from not being part of the initial strategy that goes into a project**

- **Push for speed and efficiency to create quickly**

DesignOps has rapidly evolved as a discipline, management tool, and way of thinking for creative teams to help create solutions for these challenges.

The rising popularity of DesignOps roles at companies around the world show the merit of bringing people and processes together to streamline the approach to design challenges. By having scalable systems and teams with documented principles and accountability measures, designers have more time and energy for design innovation.

Theresa Neil,
Top Designer in Technology, O'Reilly Author,
Founder of *Guidea*

Here's where the solution comes in. When done well DesignOps instills a barrier between the design team and outside distractions so that they can focus on the work at hand.

That includes a variety of things:

- **Operations management**

- **Process design**

- **Project management**

- **Communication strategy**

- **Onboarding and team culture**

- **Budget allocation and control**

- **Managing procurement**

- **Legal, IT, and security**

SEAMLESS COLLABORATION

Collaboration is at the heart of DesignOps. It's also a constant challenge in many design and development organizations, which is where the methodology can help provide viable solutions.

Too often, there's missing communication between product and design teams. The overarching strategy behind a project isn't always fully transparent to everyone. That is the challenge.

The DesignOps solution is to create better communication strategies as part of the overall management of each project. That can be a cultural phenomenon that lives within a team and starts as early as new employee onboarding and can extend through the tools and processes teams use to get the work done.

The element that helps make it work successfully is that collaboration feels seamless. Designers and developers and product managers are thinking about how they

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While design hand-off is, no doubt, an invaluable step, it is important to remember that hand-offs aren't a moment in time, but a process and should be baked into the process early on.

In Delivery Hero – Talabat, we baked collaboration right into our design process. Designers, PM and engineers develop a prototype together and iterate their way to high-fidelity - using our design system. By the time designs are ready to be coded, engineers have a pretty good idea of what to build and there are no surprises. In addition to collaboration, our design system code library which hosts 80% of the UI has proven to be an invaluable tool in making hand-offs seamless.

Amber Jabeen,
Sr. Manager, DesignOps,
Delivery Hero MENA – Talabat

work together. DesignOps roles within an organization facilitate clean design through usable and applicable processes and tools.

What that means in action: Teams create and use high-level design documentation for projects that is referenced from start to finish. This can keep projects running smoothly and goals and strategy are always at the forefront.

ABILITY TO SCALE
THE DESIGN PROCESS

One of the key reasons that companies and design teams begin to consider DesignOps roles is a desire to scale.

As teams and companies grow, projects don't keep happening at side-by-side desks belonging to a designer and developer. Those people might not be in the same building or even country, depending on the company and growth.

This dynamic requires structure and process so that everyone has the same access to information, design standards and tools, workflow, and quality control.

Airbnb started their DesignOps process with a Design Language System to "unify our design language across platforms and empower designers and engineers to build

solutions as parts of a greater whole, all while accelerating the design and development process."

As the team continued to grow, so did the need for greater information and unification and what started as designed standards turned into a greater DesignOps team. The reach of scaling design expanded to multiple teams throughout Airbnb to include anyone related to user experience or digital platforms.

Our mission is to provide agility to the whole product organization through centralized tools, systems and services that enhance speed and quality of execution,

wrote Adrian Cleave, Director of DesignOps at Airbnb about the evolution of the practice.

Our functions include Design Program Management, Design Tools, Localization, Production Design and Team Coordinators. We work closely with Marketing, Product, Design and Engineering to create the best user experiences possible.

Now, Airbnb has five teams devoted to DesignOps, showing how a company can evolve from a small malleable team working together in a small conference room to a worldwide industry leader. Companies like this that face rapidly changing – and escalating – design needs can find the greatest benefit in implementing a DesignOps philosophy.

MANAGING NEEDS

The timetable for which a team needs to develop greater DesignOps roles and tools can vary greatly by organization. The natural evolution of managing these needs often comes at a time of growth and when the team begins to have questions about structure, process, and quality assurance.

Teams that are ready to move into more of a DesignOps workflow may be asking some of the following questions internally:

- **How can we grow over time?**

- **How can we ensure that quality design is a priority?**

- **How can we attract and retain skilled design talent?**

- **How can we create more efficient design processes?**

- **How can we create measurement milestones to improve designs?**

- **How can we create better collaboration inside our company but outside specific design roles?**

- **How can we simplify our toolstack?**

Beginning to answer these questions and manage those needs is the foundation of the DesignOps process for most organizations.

How long it takes to start seeing a shift can vary, but the overall importance shows why it is a necessary function for some teams. DesignOps can:

- **Create time-saving systems**

- **Create a collaboration collective within an organization**

- **Highlight DesignOps proponents and advocates**

- **Provide an opportunity for hiring and shift in culture**

- **Better manage interdepartmental workflow, resulting in better projects**

LOOKING AHEAD

So why is it so beneficial to implement DesignOps structure in an organization? What can you expect?

Chapter 3 will show you how DesignOps influences people and which areas of your company it will impact.

IMPACT OF DESIGNOPS

by **Robin Klein Schiphorst,** former DesignOps at *frog*

Robin coaches enterprises, startups, and individuals to unleash their full potential through DesignOps, lean Design Thinking, and brand strategy. Expert who worked with companies like frog, Laerdal, Schibsted in multi-brand Design Systems and building inclusive work cultures. Say hi and bounce some ideas off him.

- **A Unique Opportunity To Do It The Designer's Way**

- **The Impact on People**

- **Let's Level Up**

- **More Time For Work That Matters**

- **The Impact On You (And Your Team)**

- **Looking Ahead**

03

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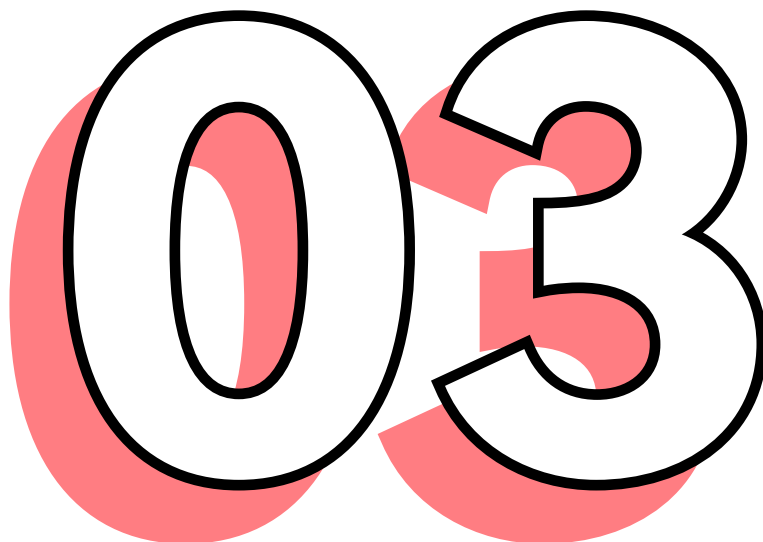
If I knew DesignOps was going to become what it is today, I would have invested more time in building out a standard set of metrics to quantify and raise awareness of the benefits thereby cutting down on the timeline to get DesignOps more widely accepted as a formal career path.

Roxann Adams,
DesignOps Manager, CIO Design,
IBM

Your organization's experience and impact of DesignOps, start with the motivation that drives you to jump into this role.

Are you…

- **A people person at heart,
  who wants to see others shine?**

- **Love to geek out on processes and methods?**

- **Get energized from taking on the impossible?**

- **Loves to listen to, create order
  and structure from chaos?**

- **Thrives on the intersection of people,
  business, and technology?**

- **Or are you looking for an easy way
  to climb the ladder?**

Your personality will steer the success of your journey more than you will imagine; embrace the facilitator and enabler in you. There is no place for Ego; together is the keyword. Discover and then utilize people's knowledge to connect the dots across the organization to break down silos.

The mindset you master, your ability to handle stress, and your past work experience will allow you to connect people across different fields and levels in the organization. Seek unique opportunities where others see obstacles and

pave the way for collaborations. And resolve old conflicts to create a workplace people love!

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO DO IT THE DESIGNER'S WAY

Those who have experienced large re-organizations know what we are talking about. Unfortunately, frustration and disbelief in the approach cause more damage than good.

A top-down approach means a handful of people micro-manage thinking and decisions for the whole organization, with very little input from anyone else.

I've used the following metaphor in my playbook:

What looks like one whale underwater is actually a school of thousands of fish when you come close. Each of them with their own past, personality, challenges, and goals. To unite as one and intuitively adapt to chance, each body part (division) needs to move in harmony, speak the same language, trust the one next to them and be willing to compromise for the greater good.

DesignOps gives us this unique opportunity to do it the **design way**. In this inclusive process, we listen to our audience, build, use and celebrate together, bottom-up and top-down.

A project to benefit all, with an internal budget, opens the doors for healthy discussions, lays down the hatches, and shows people what happens on the other side. Thus, creating respect and understanding, shared ownership, and pride on all levels. Our new way of working is a result used by those who made it, together.

1 Through DesignOps, we have seen c-level directors joining designers' workshops and training sessions, showing interest to deeply understand the complexity of design systems and realizing what it takes to design modern products.

2 DesignOps has resolved many clashes between departments like Marketing & Communication vs. Product Designers—a typical battle at most organizations. DesignOps brings clashing teams together on a common goal to relieve work pressure and unify the brand as a neutral party.

THE IMPACT ON PEOPLE

DesignOps is a fantastic service to the people in the organization. It allows them to do more work that inspires them, work that matters most to the users and the company.

DesignOps reduces repetitive tasks, stress, and burnouts while training team members through skills development

programs and by placing people in the right teams and the right project.

Build on trust and clarity

DesignOps frees time by redesigning workflows to facilitate scale and growth.
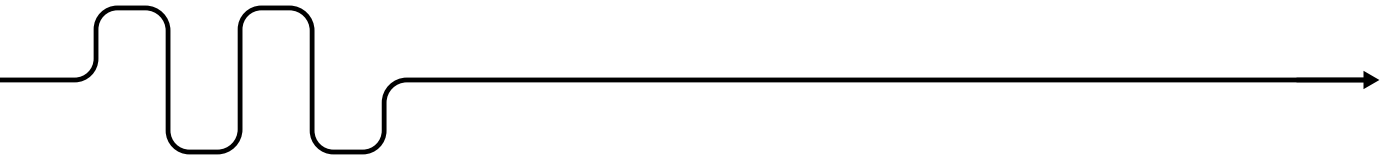
Scaling quickly with a short-staffed team takes a tremendous toll on people — both emotionally and for professional growth. Organizational silos, lack of understanding of each other's work, and miscommunication add to the immense workload.

The result: *team members resent the work and workplace!*

Take another look at these three points from **Chapter 2**:

- **creating a smooth collaboration,**

- **enable the ability to scale,**

- **manage needs and expectations.**

What you are doing is building a culture of trust and clarity—letting people know that the organization has their back. There will always be someone to cover you because we share the work process and documentation methods.

You probably know some people in your organization who can benefit from this effect by giving people a sense of calm and peace. They feel if they stop working, everything will fall apart. They hold vital knowledge in their heads instead of finding an effective method to distribute it.

Retain and attract talent

Shared ways of working also enable team rotation, the ability to work with different teams spices things up! Thus, allowing designers to learn new skills, explore new challenges, and enjoy a change of scenery.

This method helps attract and retain talent. One of the main reasons people leave is because they get bored; monotony is a killer!

Many large organizations fear moving people around due to poor handover and onboarding processes. What these organizations forget is it's worse to have talent leave due to boredom.

That is where DesignOps can make a significant difference. You create an exciting work environment, making it easier to retain and recruit talented team members.
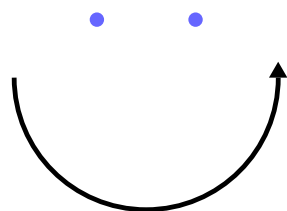
LET'S LEVEL UP

With busy schedules, competency development can fall through the cracks. DesignOps frees time for learning and assigns people to projects that fit their learning goals and passion.

- **Through team rotation, you keep things fresh and exciting.**

- **The newfound trust and established sharing sessions motivate people to share their knowledge.**

- **You can protect designers from unneeded distractions like politics so they can practice their craft.**

- **With design systems, you can scale knowledge throughout the organization and free up time for deep work. Best practice components and guidelines replace repetitive design work.**

- **People speak the same language now, so developers and designers can share their ideas better and spend less time on boring handover conversations.**

- **By freeing time, the innovative features and projects are back on the roadmap, which means new paths to explore with energized designers.**

As you can see, learning while providing value for the company can go hand-in-hand. A win-win if you design the experience and roadmap correctly.

MORE TIME FOR WORK THAT MATTERS

We were able to decrease the amount of investment required for rote design work by 75% after implementing DesignOps at a Fortune 100 financial company. This freed up considerable resources to invest in mission critical UX research, design thinking and product innovation.

Theresa Neil, Top Designer in Technology,
O'Reilly Author, and Founder of *Guidea*
on delivering DesignOps
for enterprise organizations

You might find more people or money, but time is limited! If you look at the amount of time lost on unimportant discussions, repetitive tasks, inefficient workflows, and stretched meetings, not to forget thinking about how to defend your design process, yikes—you don't only lose time but focus!

How many innovative ideas go undiscovered?

We need to create more time for work that matters so that we fundamentally change the life of a user and make the business stronger.

Innovation doesn't happen in small iterations. Instead, it occurs when you are immersed in deep work and research. When you're able to lead ahead of the curve and explore new opportunities.

Let's have a look at two examples where DesignOps saved time for more valuable work.

DesignOps Supports Data-Driven Innovation

The largest national newspaper in Norway created an algorithm to design a personalized front page experience in 2015. The algorithm enabled a data-driven, A/B tested design with the ability to iterate at a much faster speed. A significant difference from the manual design which experienced a few minutes delay before updating.

Now, the editor's talent is put to better use, the product team could test non-stop and explore ideas fast while users enjoy a more personalized experience.

Remember: The goal was not to replace people but to optimize by removing mundane, repetitive tasks with short lifetime value while enabling personalized experiences through data-driven design. Now, these people have

time to think and work on big innovation that delivers long lifetime value.

DesignOps Helped Teams Adapt to Lockdowns

When corona hit, organizations switched to remote teams and only those with a design system were prepared! They were able to shift to new digital services fast.

DesignOps and the organization's design system enabled them to innovate quickly (with over 450 creatives). They went from creating complex wireframe-style prototypes in two weeks to handle a last-minute request of four prototypes in just 4 days(now on brand, animated, and ready to code!)—because they had a design system in place!

Now let's imagine what you can do by winning back 4-8 hours a week.

1 Additional user interviews to ensure your team builds what the user wants and not what they assume they want.

2 Explore multiple directions instead of one.

3 Design those loveable app features and get them coded.

4 Conduct follow-up user testing to validate the improvements based on previous user interviews.

5 Explore better ways of working to free up talent stuck in repetitive activities.

THE IMPACT ON YOU (AND YOUR TEAM)

Last but not least, the impact a DesignOps specialist will have on your organization and building strong teams!

Is this a role I want to take on? Are you ready to release your design skills to a whole new level for the organization and create a daily buzz?

Design the employee's experience and that of the user.

Enabling a smooth collaboration with innovation at scale means you will have your finger on the pulse. Organizing collective creation across teams and projects will give you a breadth of knowledge and insights.

Depending on the organization's size, DesignOps can involve hundreds of projects from multiple brands across all types of user segments. Solve developer and business challenges, and allow you to interact with every kind of (employee) personality you can imagine.

- **At 9 am you're speaking with fellow designers about the lack of time for research**

- **At 10 am, you're discussing scale with developers**

- **And at 11, you're pitching a business case to C-level management**

Your ability to speak your audience's language and live in their shoes will demand you to switch multiple times a day. You are drawing from your experience, organization, and communication skills.

It is diverse, chaotic, and overloaded with information; it will demand you to think from a high level about design details for each project.

But, above all, it is an immensely gratifying role! You can help others grow and enjoy their workday like never before. You can solve complex challenges at the business, design, technology, and user level.

It is like living three years in one. Grey hairs are almost a guarantee! And if done right, you will have a positive impact on the organization, enriching countless users' lives—to a magnitude you haven't been able to do before. Your skills, network, and gratitude will skyrocket.

Your ability to think across the business, technology, and people's needs, as well as to resolve conflicts and use your design skills in a whole new way, will feel like new superpowers. You can put all your knowledge into play, learning faster than ever before, while meeting all sorts of people during the adventure!

LOOKING AHEAD

So what makes DesignOps work within an organization? How can you begin to implement DesignOps processes and roles within your team?

Chapter 4 will take a look at how it all comes together in a way that is harmonious, prioritizes work, and creates an accurate measure of a team's capacity.

HOW DESIGNOPS WORKS

- **DesignOps Mindset**

- **Work Together**

- **Harmonize**

- **Prioritize**

- **Measure Team Capacity**

- **Looking Ahead**

04

When it comes to DesignOps, there are two distinctions: a mindset and a team function, role, or responsibility (job title). While the terminology is quite interchangeable, it can mean two things as well.

This chapter focuses on the mindset; **Chapter 5** is more about the team function or role.

The DesignOps mindset is important for teams of any size – even down to a freelance designer working on their own because it helps create long-term processes and efficiencies that result in better, more consistent work.

DESIGNOPS MINDSET

Gus Correia of UX Collective wrote about the DesignOps mindset like this:

DesignOps is not a new design department. It's 'how' interfaces between design, product, engineering are managed. Also DesignOps is about creating a culture of use centricity and agility over time. It puts design not as just another step along the way, but as a continuous ritual of handovers and feedback.

The DesignOps mindset is applying the same strategies and thinking you take into a design project to your company structure and work mentality.

In **Chapter 1**, we looked at the Nielsen Norman Group's definition of DesignOps in three main areas:

1   **How we work together**: Organize teams, collaborate, and humanize environments and gatherings for more efficient work

2   **How we get work done**: Standardize processes, harmonize so there's a shared understanding of design intelligence, and prioritize projects

3   **How our work creates impact**: Measure work to create accountability, socialize as a tool to educate others on the value of design, and enable the use of design thinking and related activities.

The DesignOps mindset puts all three of the objectives together. You could further simplify it:

The DesignOps mindset helps us work together to get impactful things done.

This is true for an individual as well as a team of 40 to 50 designers.

On the individual level, you are thinking with a DesignOps mindset when you do things like using a common naming structure for files and folders. It helps create an efficiency for when you need to go back and find something.

On the team level, the DesignOps mindset doesn't start with a person having the title of "DesignOps Manager";

it starts with using common tools, templates, workflows, and processes and procedures for design-related tasks.

Think about your organization and workflows. Is the start of a DesignOps mindset already there? Let's take it a step further.

WORK TOGETHER

In the Nielsen Norman Group model, how teams work together is the foundation of the mindset. This part of the mindset is often the part of almost any structure involving multiple teams and people.

This is how it works:

- **Teams work together in a way that organizes tasks, structure, roles**. This is the organization chart for your company with names, roles, possibly job descriptions. Organized teams help ensure the success of people in their roles, assigning appropriate functions and team structures.

- **Teams create their own processes, cultural norms, and communities**. Meetings, the work environment, and even unwritten rules of governance for the organization comprise this element of working together.

- **Teams humanize the overall experience**. Unlike computers or algorithms that assign tasks and roles, the human

experience portion of DesignOps puts emphasis on hiring and retention of talent in the workplace while facilitating personal and team growth. The mindset focuses on people as the key element of operations.

HARMONIZE

While the Nielsen Norman Group model is the starting point for how DesignOps works, the harmonizing element of getting work done is the key when it comes to defining mindset. When the design team harmonizes, there's so much more potential for success and efficient work. This is the gold standard of productivity.

Think of all the harmonies you can create in the workplace during the process of getting work done.

- **Standards for processes and tools that make work easier**

- **Use of design systems**

- **Managing assets consistently**

- **Creating research hubs for data development and collection**

- **Assuring balance of workflow and asset allocation**
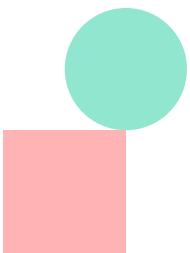
When all these things happen together, the workplace and design flow are harmonious and efficient. It's easy to envision and a concept, but a little more difficult to put into practice. That's where prioritization comes in, particularly in the beginning stages of supporting a DesignOps workspace.

PRIORITIZE

Proper priority helps ensure the ability to create impact. When a team manages itself and works well, things fall into place.

Think about the last design project you worked on.

- **Was the workflow balanced between team members?**

- **Was the right amount of time estimated for the work you were supposed to complete?**

- **Did you have the proper allocation of tools and resources to work effectively?**

If you answered "no" to any of the questions above, then you understand the value of prioritization in the DesignOps mindset. It only works if you have what you need when you need it to get the job done.

When the DesignOps mindset is the roadmap for your team, these elements become part of a standardized process to ensure that you never answer "no" again.

MEASURE TEAM CAPACITY

Finally, change and goals are hard to accomplish without measurables. To get the full impact of DesignOps, you need to measure results, create a value system for meeting defined goals, and enable further development. These measurables and milestones can impact team capacity and efficiency as well as impact design quality and consistency.

Measurables for design teams might include:

- **Grading system or checklist that make it clear when a project is done**

- **Scale for design quality to meet standards or project goals**

- **Use of processes and systems during a path**

- **Notations of success stories that are shared with the team**

- **Training hours for employees who learn new tools or systems**

- **Project timelines from start to finish**

Tracking these measurables against goals over time can help you determine the effectiveness of the mindset on a team. Is the culture of DesignOps helping create better, more consistent work or are people finding it to be a challenge? Having the culture and mindset in place before codifying DesignOps rules can make the process feel more natural.

LOOKING AHEAD

Now it is time to start thinking about how DesignOps roles or functions could benefit and work within your company or organization. With the right tools and resources, integrating DesignOps into your team structure can be highly beneficial.

It's also not an overnight solution. Adding a DesignOps manager or team member requires planning, budgeting, and process management. A culture that's already using design thinking concepts is on the right track to move down this path most quickly, but almost any team with a want can get there with some work.

HOW TO GET STARTED WITH DESIGNOPS IN YOUR COMPANY

- **Research the Problem: How to Get Started with DesignOps**

- **Define the Value: How Will Your Team Benefit from DesignOps**

- **Prioritize and Roadmap: What Does Your Implementation Strategy Look Like**

- **Your Company Isn't Alone**

- **Looking Ahead**

05

Looking for competitive advantage? Adding DesignOps to your team could give you the edge.

This is how you get started with DesignOps in your company: **Treat it like a problem you'd solve using this very mindset**.

The Nielsen Norman Group has a three-part implementation strategy. That's the foundation of where we are going with this roadmap, while adding in some more applications and examples of others who have been here already.

RESEARCH THE PROBLEM: HOW TO GET STARTED WITH DESIGNOPS

If you are at the point of looking at how DesignOps could work for your team, it's likely because you are experiencing some pain points. These challenges could be due to growth, working remotely, changes to job functions or work product, or issues with partners.

That's the starting point for DesignOps implementation. Take a good look at the problem before working toward the solution.

DesignOps is best suited for problems that can be remedied with processes and procedures to streamline and make work more consistent.

Treat this problem like you would treat a client project. Conduct discovery research to get at current challenges and future concerns.

As you work through this process, think about the areas where DesignOps can be most beneficial (from **Chapter 2**):

- **Seamless collaboration**

- **Ability to scale the design process**

- **Managing needs**

Then you can work through how to better arrange parts of your team to create better workflows and efficiencies.

# DEFINE THE VALUE: HOW WILL YOUR TEAM BENEFIT FROM DESIGNOPS

For a DesingOps plan to provide real value and be successful within your company it needs to provide benefit. The second step of getting started is to define the value for your team or teams.

"

If I were to revisit, the most significant
lesson I learned is to establish the strategic value
of DesignOps before you try and scale the team.
This requires really understanding the culture,
the people and the unique strategic value
DesignOps can bring to the organisation.
I believe DesignOps is a competitive advantage of
any design team which sets them up for success
in a highly competitive and demanding landscape
of product.

Amber Jabeen,
Sr. Manager, DesignOps,
Delivery Hero MENA – Talabat

Value today might be different from value later down the line. Go back to those pain points. What is the most valuable in terms of solving those problems?
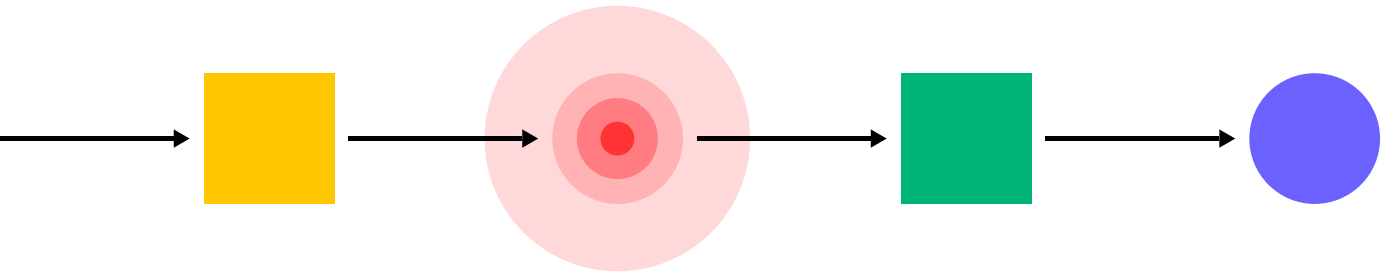
If it is growth, hiring and retention might be the core element of your DesignOps problem. If design consistency or speed is the issue, DesignOps might streamline tools or how work is done within your team.

As you get started with DesignOps, don't try to come up with a solution for every challenge at the same time. Tackle one solvable problem at a time to help create greater value for the mindset that can be replicated for another problem later.

For most teams, DesignOps is implemented over time in an evolution from one problem to processes to having a team dedicated to DesignOps at larger companies.

PRIORITIZE AND ROADMAP: WHAT DOES YOUR IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY LOOK LIKE

Finally, you want to pick what challenges to work through and create a roadmap.

- **How do you plan to accomplish these goals?**

- **Who is involved in the process?**

- **What's the timeline for implementing change?**

- **How do you generate excitement and buy-in on the greater team?**

- **What are your measures of success?**

Design this roadmap with key objectives, processes, and measurables and post it. Track your progress. The Nielsen Norman Group has a worksheet to help you visualize this or use it as a printable that can be distributed among your team.

The other key element of thinking about getting started with DesignOps in your company is needed. Can your team benefit from DesignOps?

For large organizations with teams of more than 50 designers, a design operations role is necessary to coordinate

all the designers and the different projects that they are working on. An organization with fewer designers who work in different teams also needs a DesignOps manager to coordinate the different design teams.

While a DesignOps manager might not be needed in a small organization with few designers, DesignOps thinking is still beneficial. Small design teams can work better if they standardize design processes and workflows. This will lay a foundation for scalability.

YOUR COMPANY ISN'T ALONE

Some of the biggest teams in the world started thinking about DesignOps on this same level. Airbnb wasn't always the household name they are today, and a DesignOps implementation strategy helped them evolve and expand with agility.

The Very Group is another company that created a DesignOps plan and implemented it to facilitate their growth and change during the early months of the COVID pandemic.

It's a given that each designer rightly has their own flair, tools and methods when it comes to how they deliver projects — and having that freedom and individuality is a fundamental aspect of creativity,

wrote Liam Charnock, a senior product developer.

The reality is that as a design team scales, so do the ways of working and this is where issues can start to occur. When we talk about design documentation, we're not just talking about UI specs and style guides — the growing stack of designer responsibilities results in a rising complexity of design deliverables.

That statement is exactly why DesignOps becomes so vital for teams as they think about growth, changing work processes, and how to ensure long term success.

Even if the change in mindset is challenging, the overall outcome can be worth it.

The Very Group's DesignOps structure is similar to the outline above but simplified for their work model:

- **Design it: When you get desired outcomes and a project goes well, document it to create a process.**

- **Contextualize: Create a resource framework that serves as the foundation for projects and processes.**

- **Store it: Set a codified file structure that makes file naming, storage, and finding things later a more seamless process.**

LOOKING AHEAD

Once the mindset and team structure are in place, all you need are some tools to facilitate the DesignOps process.

Many of the tools are things that you are already using or familiar with, but some may be new to your team.

Figuring out what tools work for your team is the final step in ensuring that a DesignOps philosophy and workflow can put you on the path to long-term growth and success.

DESIGNOPS TOOLS

- **Design Tools**

- **Optimizing Performance**

- **Tools for Project Management**

- **Tools for Team-Building**

- **Looking Ahead**

06

While a lot of theory and information around DesignOps focuses on theory and strategy, it gets even easier to visualize with the help of design and development tools that make life easier.

The right tools can help you implement DesignOps processes and workflows to teams in a way that works for you. Here, we're going to dive into a variety of options that can help almost any DesignOps thinker. From tools for work to optimizing performance to managing projects and building your design team, there's something for everyone looking to get deeper into the DesignOps mindset.

DESIGN TOOLS

The right design tool can facilitate DesignOps thinking and processes. UXPin with Merge technology allows designers to prototype with components that developers have already coded. Every element is interactive and in line with all standards, making this a tool that can decrease project uptimes and increase design consistency.

The tool allows designers to import or sync components from the developers Git repository or Storybook.

This tool puts the DesignOps mindset at the forefront. It helps create consistency with common components, code, and user interfaces.

"

Seamless collaboration across project teams is essential to our success. To drive further awareness and engagement, we leverage a core set of as-a-service digital design, whiteboarding and project tracking tools which enable designers and developers to co-create designs. Designs can be updated in real-time and evolved as needed when additional feedback is captured from stakeholders.

Marc W. Wisniewski,
Design Producer & STSM CIO Design,
IBM

Here's where this design tool works for you:

- **It helps unify design systems. You can build a complete system in UXPin and use Merge to design with the same consistency with interactive and production-ready UI elements and components.**

- **It introduces a code to design process wherein a designer designs with already coded components (interactive and in line with standards). Instead of going back and forth with their development team − deciding what is possible and what isn't − designers can use what has already been developed. The ready components can be synced with UXPin's editor (and added to a new library), and just dragged and dropped onto the canvas to create new designs. That allows developers to immediately use the code from those components to build the product without the need to develop all components from scratch, as they would normally. All in all, the code they can copy is the same as the one stored in their Git repository or Storybook.**

- **This process saves time and effort on the part of the design and development teams.**

- **It empowers product teams to go to UXPin and build a prototype and then show it to the designer who will add some final tweaks, and then, off to development.**

OPTIMIZING PERFORMANCE

Performance is a key indicator of a successful DesignOps strategy and team mentality. But how do you know if you are at peak performance?

Level Up is a seven-question assessment that can help you answer that question. It will help you benchmark against other teams of similar size so you can think about what is (or isn't) working for your team.

The takeaway is a report to help you see where you excel, pinpoint what needs work, and get a worksheet to try it with your team.

The Level Up Framework was originally developed by Heather Phillips, the Design Manager at Designer Fund, where she helped build and educate hundreds of design teams.

TOOLS FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT

One of the areas where DesignOps can really increase efficiency in teams is in project management. The right tool to manage projects is easy for your team to use and works with your established processes and procedures.

"

We've seen tremendous benefits in scaling our design process with as-a-service digital design tools as our entire team of designers now have access to a common set of project templates that contains detailed getting started info on file structure, workflow, and project top-sheet data to use when co creating with teams. In addition to templates, we additionally provide designers access to multiple design system libraries that they can easily enable or disable depending on the type of project they are working on.

Decreasing the number of duplicative or unnecessary tools in our designer toolchain, in favor of a core set of tools is essential. This goal to reduce the number of tools that we use in our designer toolchain has vastly decreased our handoff time and made it possible to push updates to templates and design system libraries with ease.

Marc W. Wisniewski,
Design Producer & STSM CIO Design,
IBM

There are a lot of project management tools to choose from. If you already have a tool you like, the goal here is to maximize usage so that your team is as efficient with administrative processes as possible.
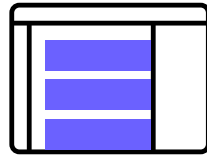
If you aren't using a project management tool, this is a good time to test drive a couple of options to see what works best for you. The key is to pick a tool that your team will actually use, expedites workflows, and can grow with your company as you scale over time.

- **Trello**: This tool uses Kanban-style cards to visually organize projects. Then the tool can be expanded with task assignments, timelines, productivity metrics, calendars, and more.

- **Asana**: With multiple views to manage assignments – lists, timelines, or boards – each user can manage the way they want to see projects and work. Plus, this tool includes some automations to speed up common flows and processes.

- **Jira**: Commonly used in the software space, this tool is made for planning, tracking, and implementation and even includes a release schedule/filter.

- **Confluence**: This workspace is by the same maker as Jira and is made specifically for remote teams to collaborate. It is designed as a single source of truth for your team; a core component of DesignOps thinking.

- **Monday**: a project management tool for building, running and scaling workflows for teams that need to strategize, plan, execute, review, and deliver projects consistently and on time.

TOOLS FOR TEAM-BUILDING

Regardless of where you are in creating a DesignOps mindset, processes, or formalized job roles, team-building around the concept is key. People are the most important element of any design or development process or plan.

These tools are made for creating more team cohesion, boosting morale, and helping more team members buy-in to what you are doing.

- **TriviaMaker**: This tool lets you host games – grid, list, trivia, or wheel – in a virtual or online environment. There are premade games or you can make your own to have fun with and energize your team.

- **Pizzatime**: Pizza parties were one of the strongest (and easiest) team-building exercises possible in the pre-COVID era. This tool allows you to send pizza to your team members anywhere so you can log on together and enjoy remotely and virtually.

- **Virtual Zoom Games**: From quick scavenger hunts to bingo, this list is packed with easy games and activities

to play online as a team to generate a more collaborative workplace.

- **Game Word Generator**: Word games can be fun and encourage brainstorming and thinking. This tool helps you do just that with simple word games that you can plan in-person or online from anywhere.

LOOKING AHEAD

What are you waiting for? Now you have all the tools and resources you need to start thinking about how to integrate DesignOps into your team or company.

Even if your organization is small, you can work with the DesignOps mindset at the forefront. The benefits can be immense, including more collaborative and cohesive work, greater consistency and efficiency, and overall optimized performance that allows you to scale when you need it.

You don't have to have DesignOps in your job title to start using these methods or ways of thinking it also works for a team of one). DesignOps, in a nutshell, is a way of codifying design thinking for larger projects and scale. Once you have the tools and mindset in place, the DesignOps mindset will just start to be a way of life and work.

Scale your Design Operations

Bring designers and developers together. Use a single source of truth to remove product drift and increase design velocity. Try **UXPin** with **Merge technology** to have designers prototype with the same components devs build products with.

Discover Merge

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>
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desktop
tablet
✓ mobile

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Submit