

Exploring DesignOps as a Business Strategic Function

Patrizia ***Bertini***

DesignOps and R&D Ops strategist at 8x8.com

pat.bertini@gmail.com

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Nice to meet you!

Endlessly Curious, Constantly Evolving

A non-linear career path filled with
experimentation
discovery
growth.



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We have lots of anecdotes about designops' impact.

Today we look at DesignOps through data.

Is DesignOps a strategic function today?



Let’s get the definitions right first

What is DesignOps - and what it does?

Design... *Ops!*

Operations Proto-Indoeuropean root **hop*
Latin Operari which means

*putting an effort to have an **effect**.*



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Operations ***transform***

resource or data into desired goods, services, or results,

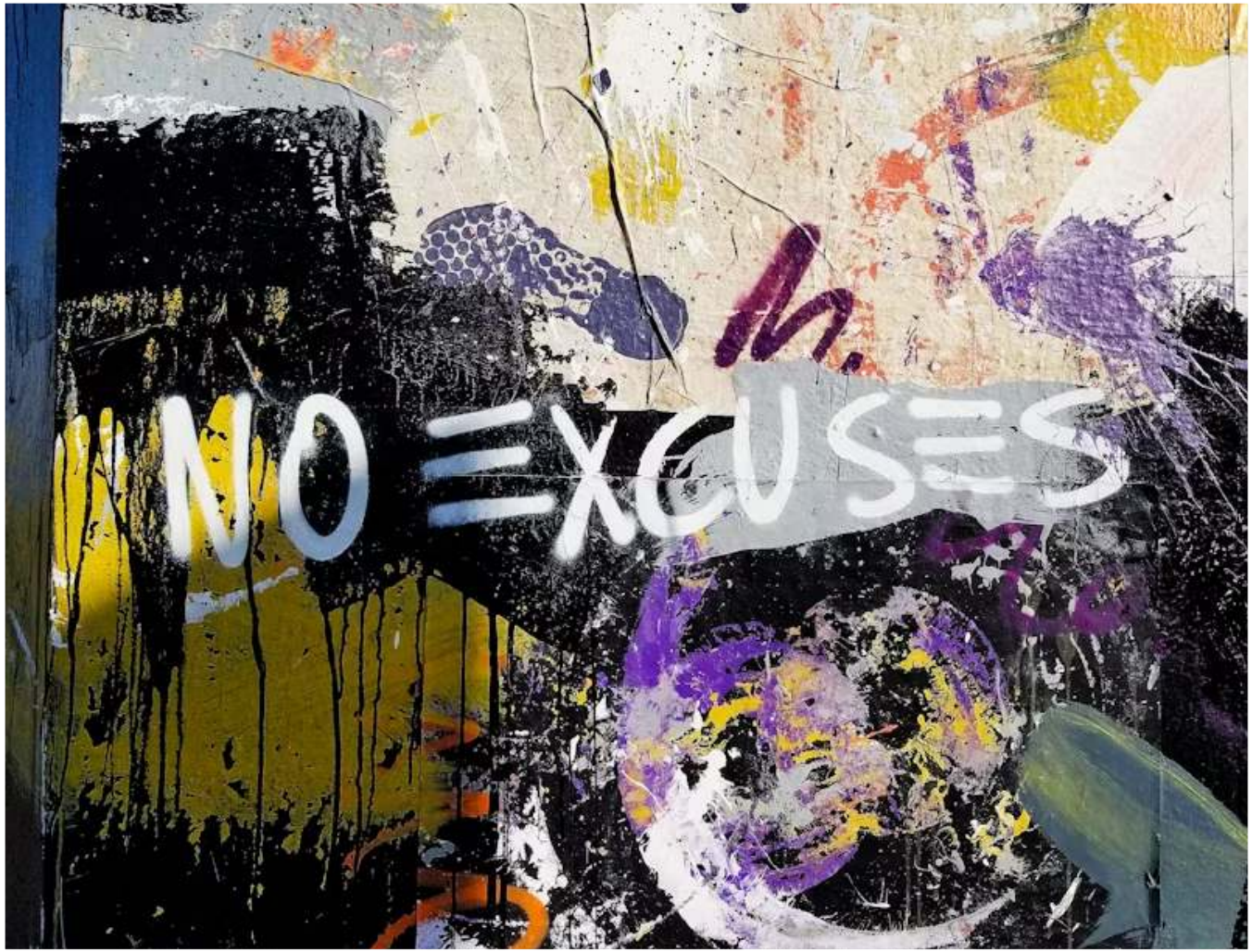
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and **create** and deliver **value** to the customers.

Source: Business Dictionary.



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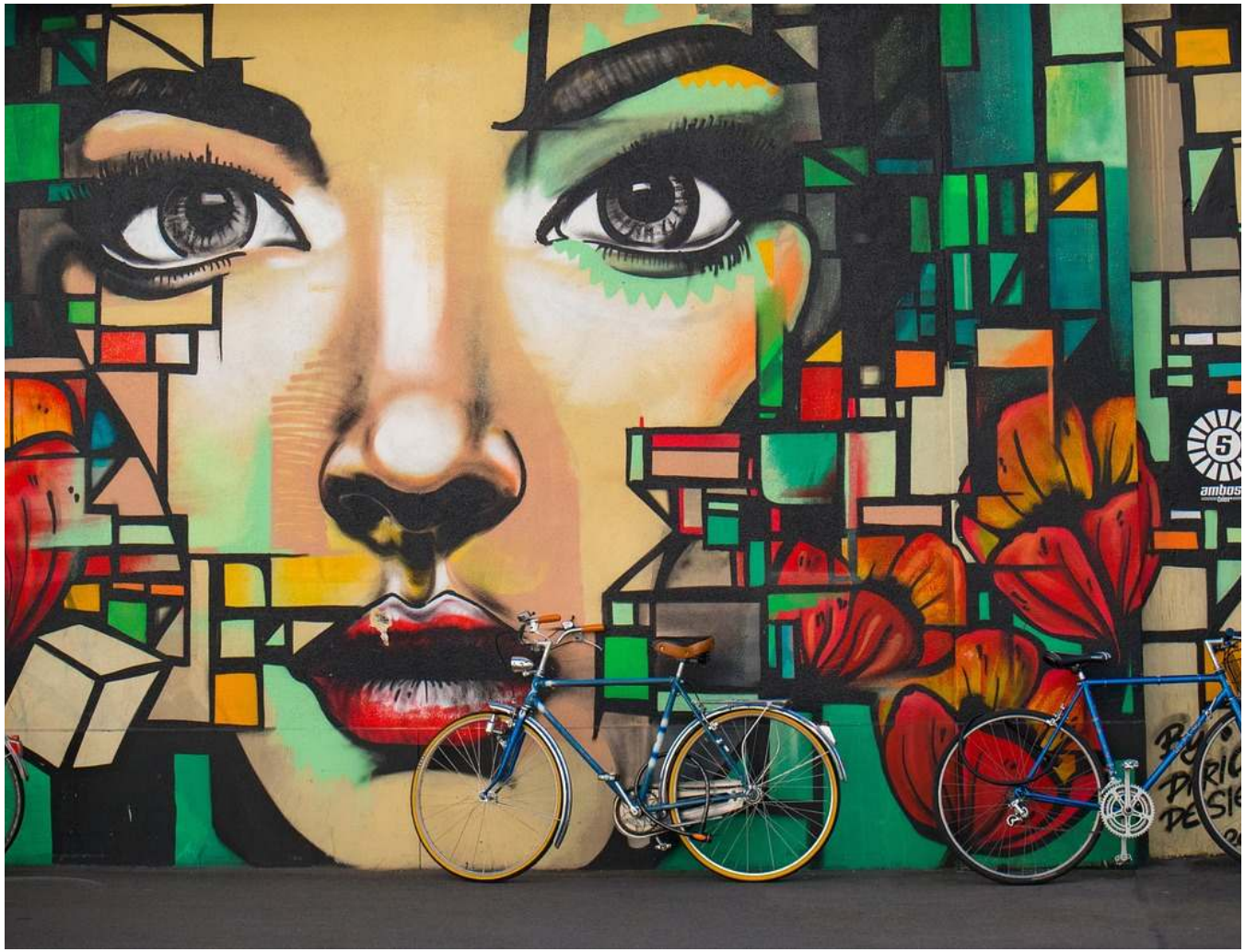




Strategic business functions have high impact, are transformative.

DesignOps is a transformational function

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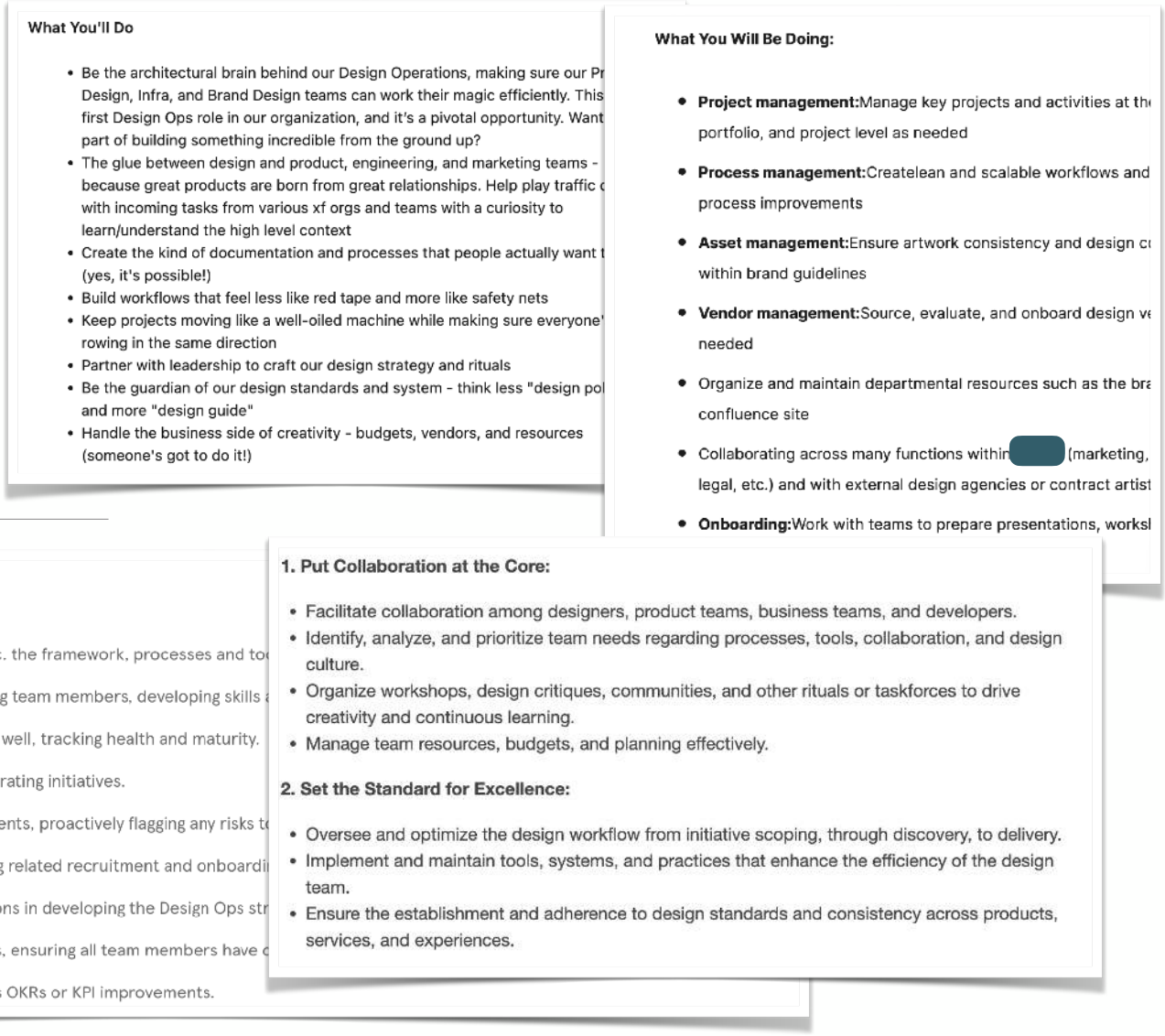




How the market perceives DesignOps as a function?

How is the market positioning DesignOps?

One title and lots of very different jobs…



What You'll Do

- Be the architectural brain behind our Design Operations, making sure our Pr Design, Infra, and Brand Design teams can work their magic efficiently. This first Design Ops role in our organization, and it's a pivotal opportunity. Want part of building something incredible from the ground up?
- The glue between design and product, engineering, and marketing teams - because great products are born from great relationships. Help play traffic with incoming tasks from various xf orgs and teams with a curiosity to learn/understand the high level context
- Create the kind of documentation and processes that people actually want t (yes, it's possible!)
- Build workflows that feel less like red tape and more like safety nets
- Keep projects moving like a well-oiled machine while making sure everyone' rowing in the same direction
- Partner with leadership to craft our design strategy and rituals
- Be the guardian of our design standards and system - think less "design pol and more "design guide"
- Handle the business side of creativity - budgets, vendors, and resources (someone's got to do it!)

What You Will Be Doing:

- **Project management:**Manage key projects and activities at th portfolio, and project level as needed
- **Process management:**Createlean and scalable workflows and process improvements
- **Asset management:**Ensure artwork consistency and design c within brand guidelines
- **Vendor management:**Source, evaluate, and onboard design ve needed
- Organize and maintain departmental resources such as the bra confluence site
- Collaborating across many functions within [redacted] (marketing, legal, etc.) and with external design agencies or contract artist
- **Onboarding:**Work with teams to prepare presentations, worksl

You will be responsible for

- Develop our Design Ops (inc. Research Ops) practice – inc. the framework, processes and to
- Lead a diverse Design Ops team, motivating and mentoring team members, developing skills
- Understand our Design Org and the pain points extremely well, tracking health and maturity.
- Steering the team in prioritising and delivering value-generating initiatives.
- Supporting the team in identifying and removing impediments, proactively flagging any risks t
- Scaling Design Ops resourcing in line with needs, managing related recruitment and onboardi
- Working closely with the Head of Agile Product & Operations in developing the Design Ops str
- Building out and tracking Design Ops objectives/measures, ensuring all team members have
- Responsible for achieving or exceeding agreed Design Ops OKRs or KPI improvements.

1. Put Collaboration at the Core:

- Facilitate collaboration among designers, product teams, business teams, and developers.
- Identify, analyze, and prioritize team needs regarding processes, tools, collaboration, and design culture.
- Organize workshops, design critiques, communities, and other rituals or taskforces to drive creativity and continuous learning.
- Manage team resources, budgets, and planning effectively.

2. Set the Standard for Excellence:

- Oversee and optimize the design workflow from initiative scoping, through discovery, to delivery.
- Implement and maintain tools, systems, and practices that enhance the efficiency of the design team.
- Ensure the establishment and adherence to design standards and consistency across products, services, and experiences.

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The Research:

How is DesignOps positioned across the main markets?

- 60+ job postings in the USA, UK, and EU on LinkedIn and Glassdoor over the past 90 days.
- All roles include "DesignOps" in the title.
- Excluded Design Programme Manager positions.
- Worked with ChatGPT as main AI partner (see Credits)

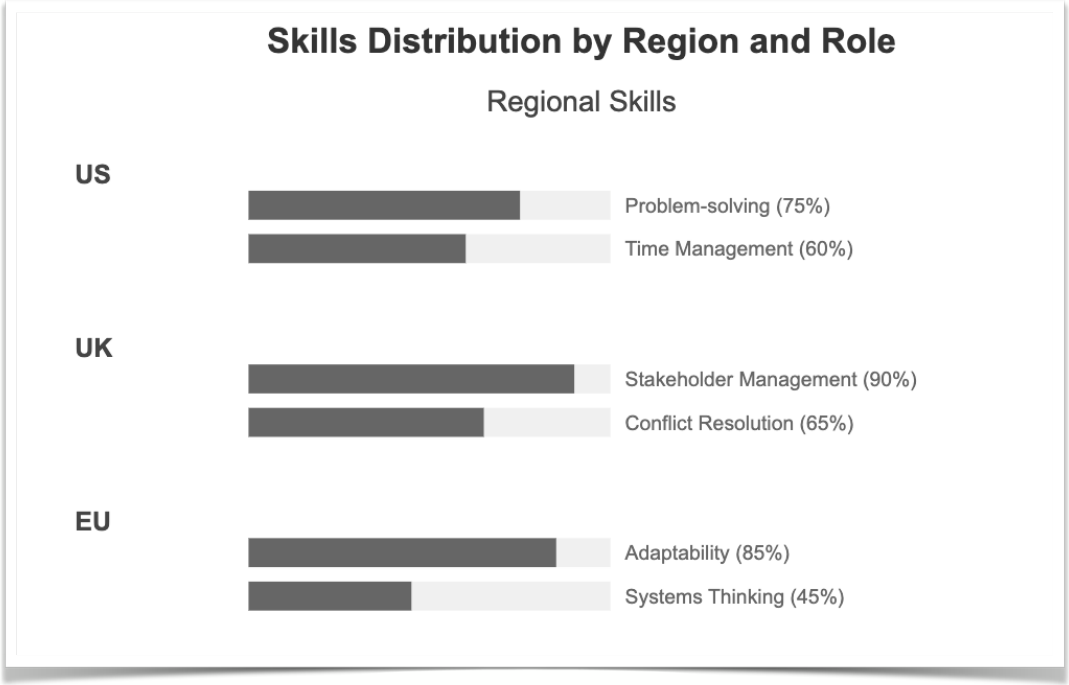


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Q1: What skills are expected in different regions?

No consistency and no one size fits all

While the US focuses on execution through problem solving and delivery, and the UK navigates relationships and complexity, while the EU looks for adaptability.



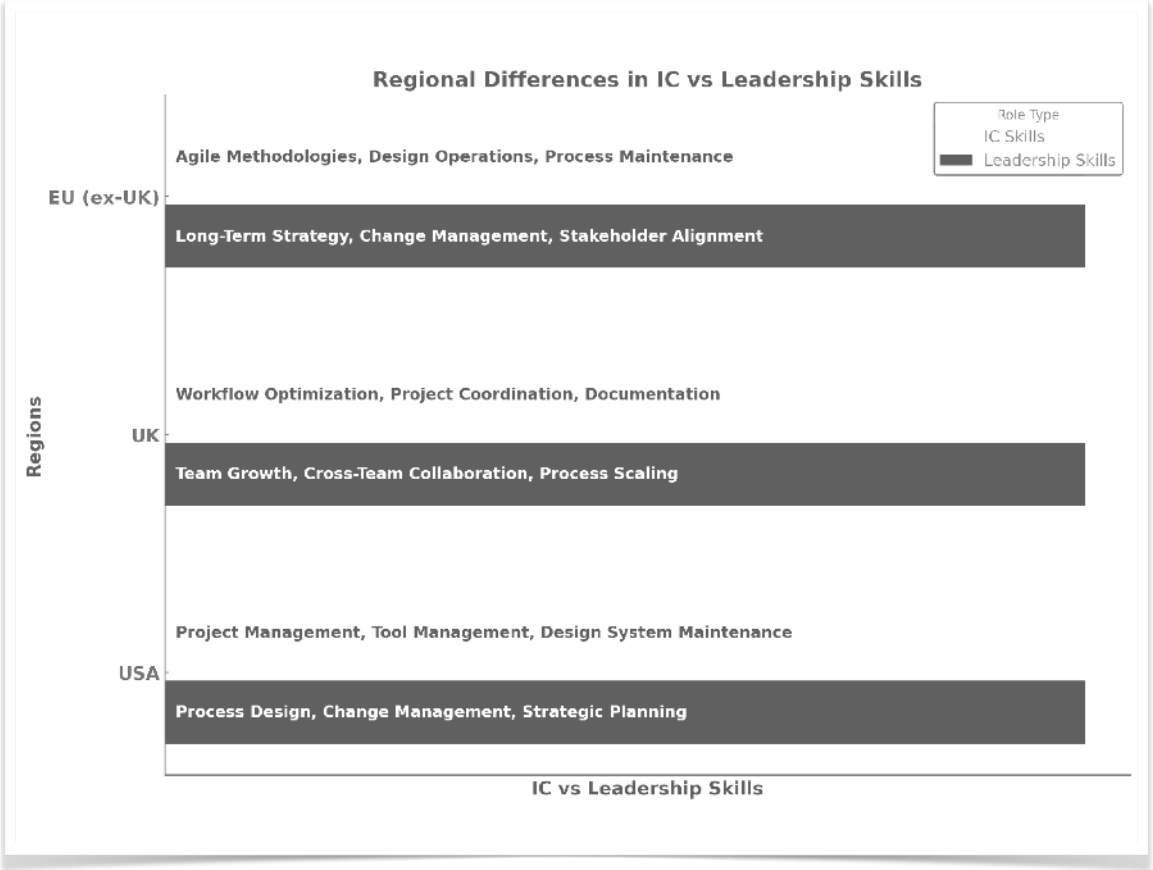
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Q2: Which skills matter to ICs and Leaders?

Leaders are change Agents, ICs execute

Change Management is a key competence for DesignOps Leadership roles (US and EU) with additional focus on process design, stakeholder alignment.

IC are required to focus on execution, workflow management, and tool optimisation.



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Change Management is emerging as a key skill for leaders across most markets.

So yes, DesignOps ***is*** a Transformational discipline!



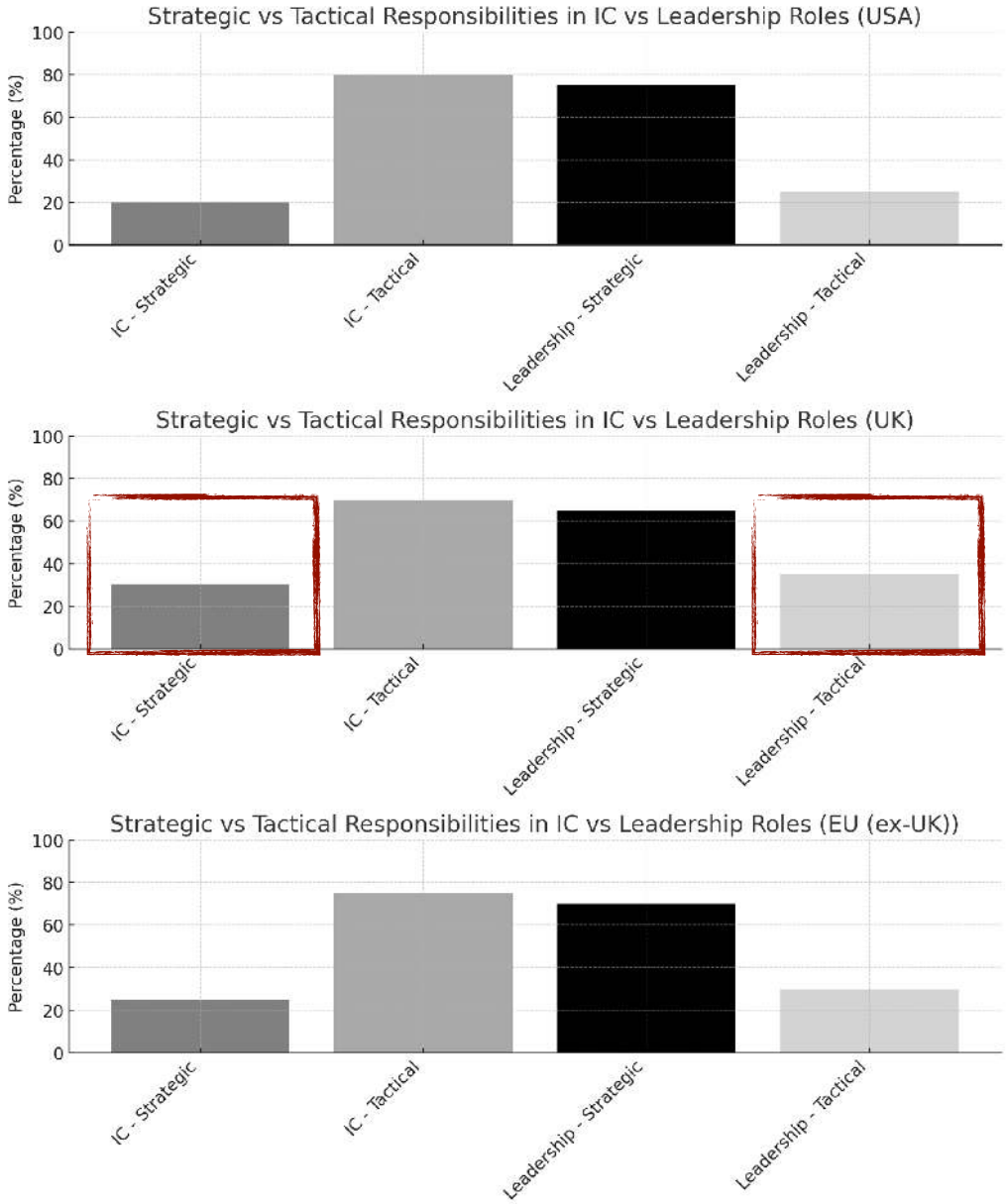
Q3: Is DesignOps mostly Tactical or Strategic?

… It's ***complicated***.

USA: Clear divide between doers and thinkers

UK: Blurred lines, strategic ICs with hands-on leaders

Europe: Early strategy exposure



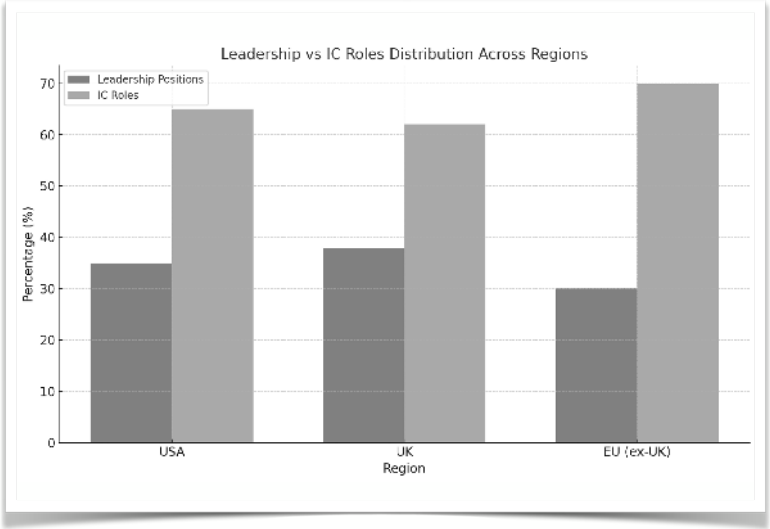
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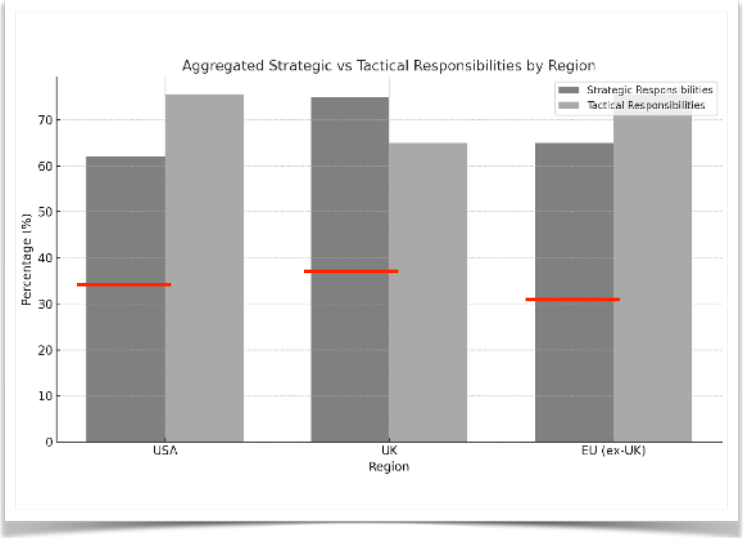
Q4: How strategic is DesignOps?

The BIG paradox

IC roles outnumber leadership 2:1,

yet job specs demand strategy over tactics for both ICs and Leaders—especially in the UK.





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Q5: When does a DesignOps role become strategic?

It depends.

- In the U.S., DesignOps remains primarily tactical and operational for the first 5+ years of experience.

- In the UK & Europe, DesignOps professionals are expected to engage in strategic tasks after around 3 years.



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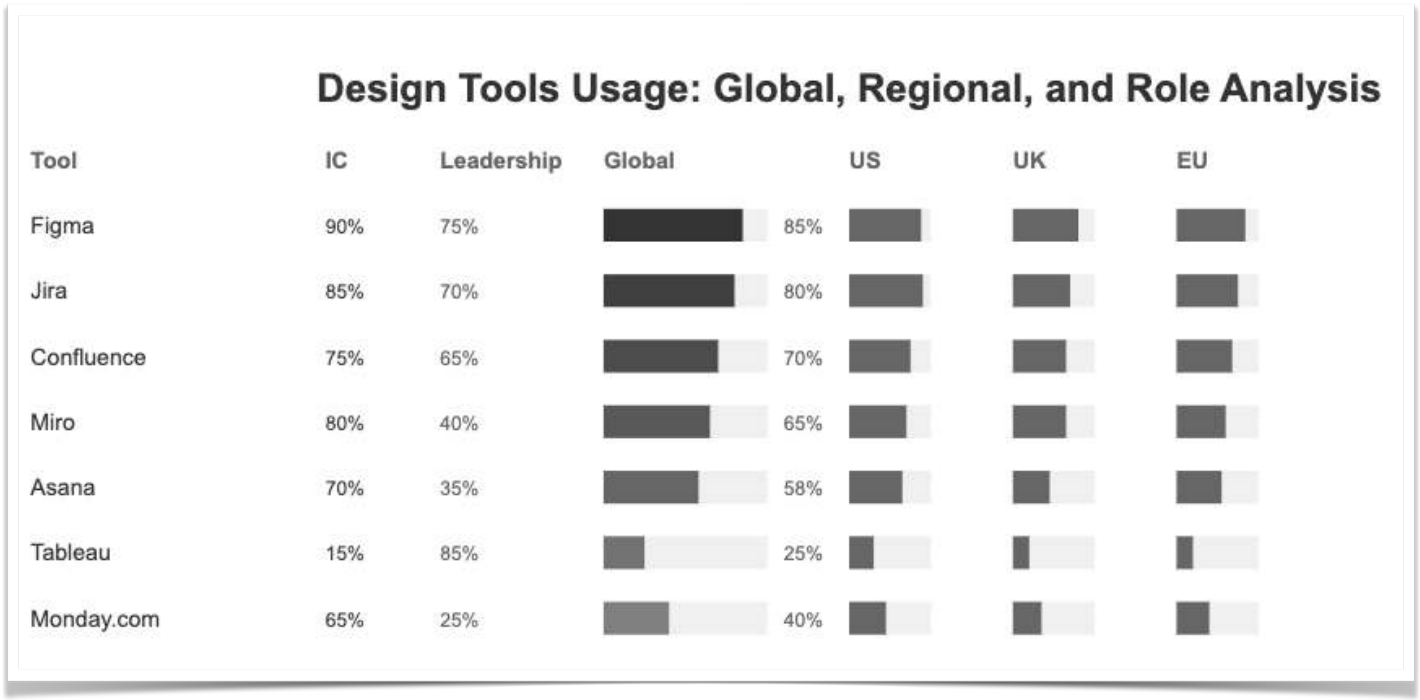
Q6: The Tools' divide

How We Use Tools Across Roles

- **Designers**: Live in Figma (90%)
- **Leaders**: Spend most time in Tableau (85%), but also Figma (75%)
- **ICs**: Excel with tools like Miro, Asana, and Monday
- **Leaders**: Focus on reporting tools

Documentation (Confluence & Jira)

- These tools bring everyone together, with 70%+ adoption across the board.



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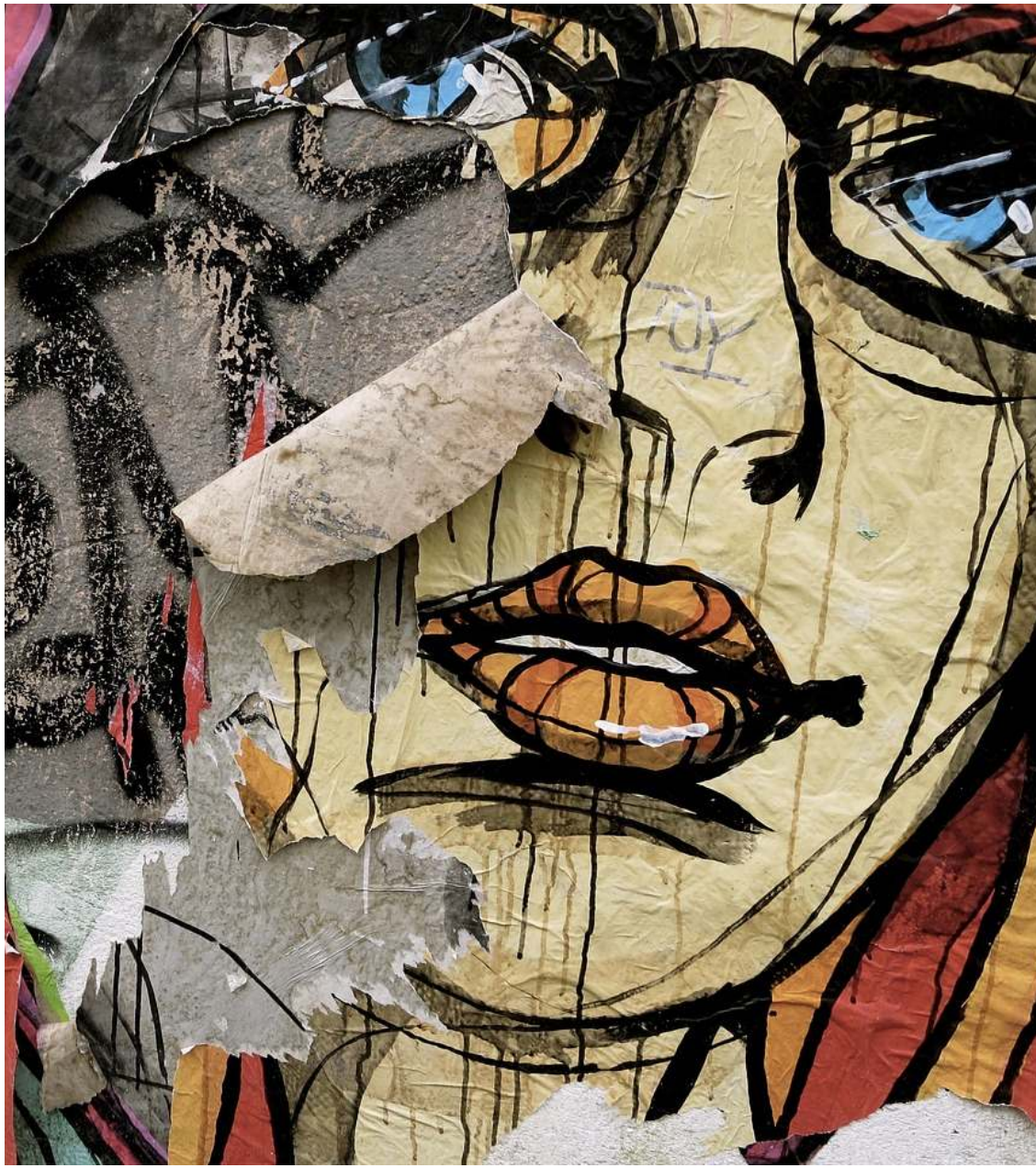
If we are exploring DesignOps as a ***Business Strategic Function***

What have we learnt?



Is DesignOps leadership **unrecognised** or **undeveloped**?

To drive business impact and be a business strategy function, **DesignOps needs recognised leadership**.



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To assess the perceived leadership in DesignOps, I analysed the job specs and categorised tasks using the Cynefin Framework.

Hypothesis:
Non-leadership roles operate in the Clear and sometimes Complicated space, while leaders navigate the Complex and Chaotic domains.

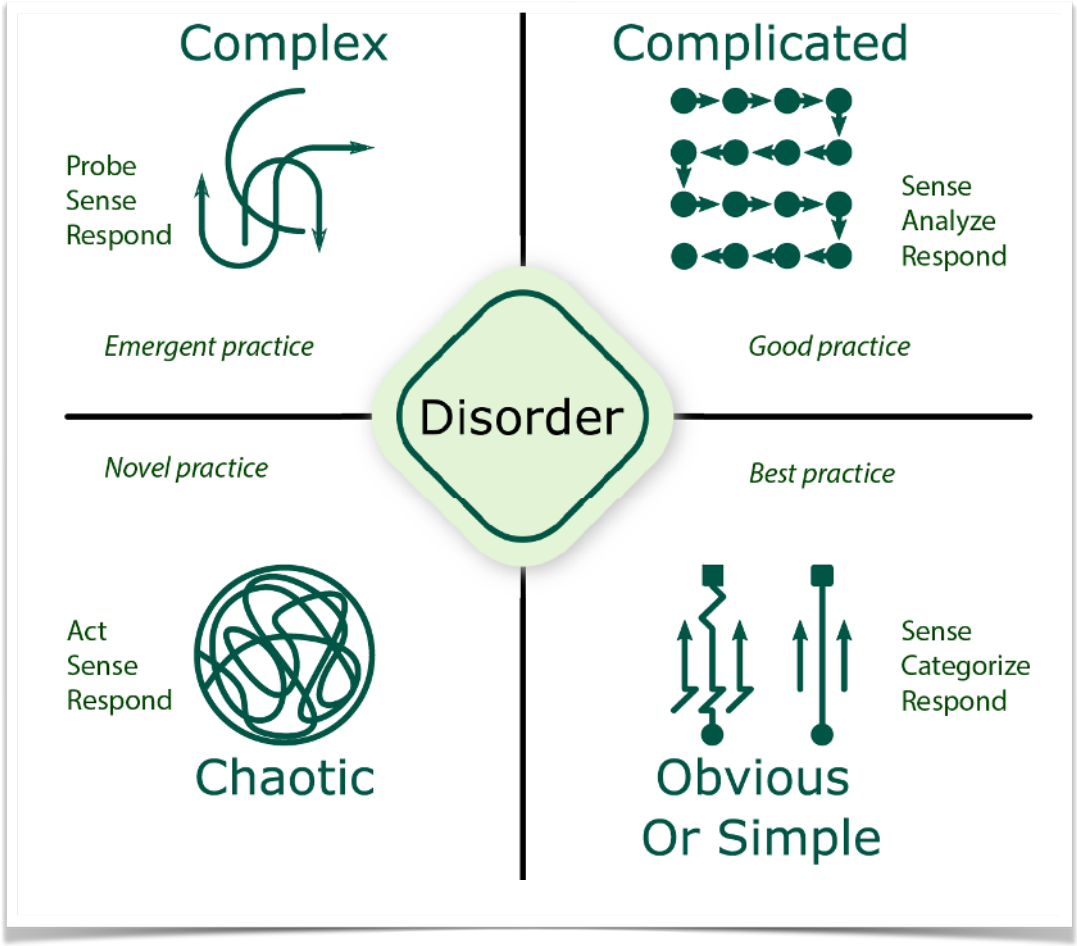


Image source: Forsa Advies

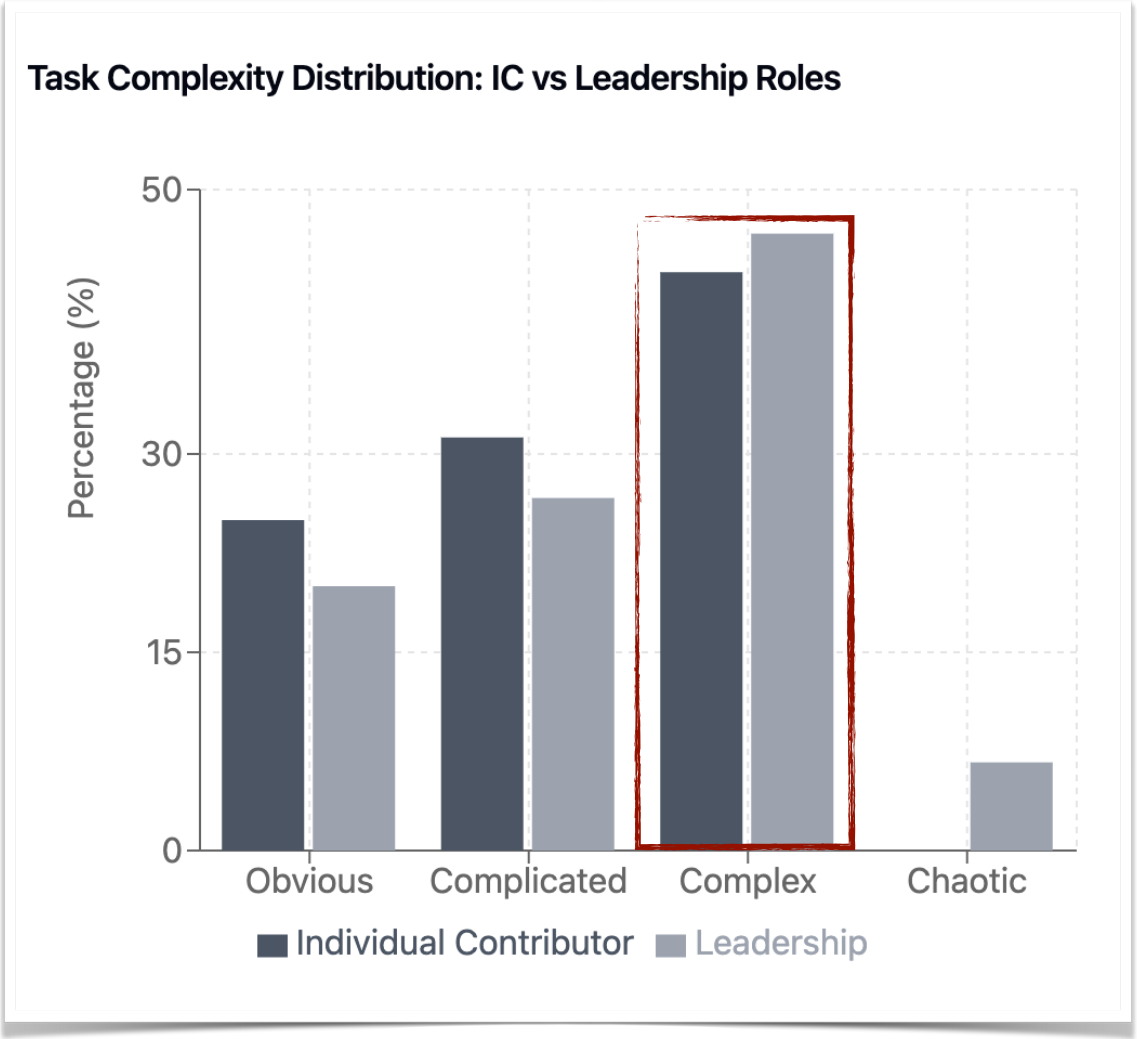
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The DesignOps Disconnect:

Strategic Power Without Strategic Voice

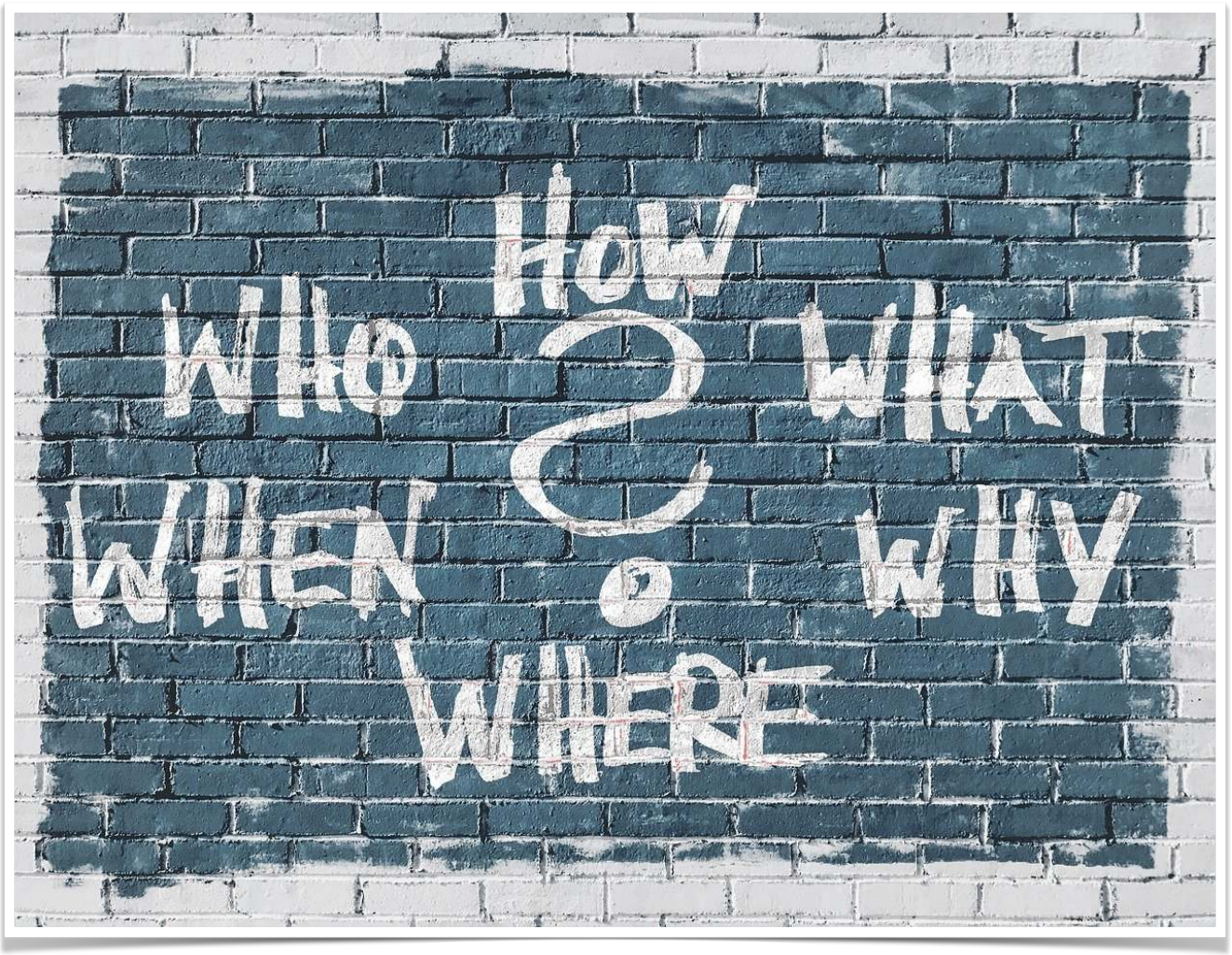
There is a strong overlap in "Complex" responsibilities, indicating DesignOps ICs are taking on more strategic tasks but with less decision-making authority.

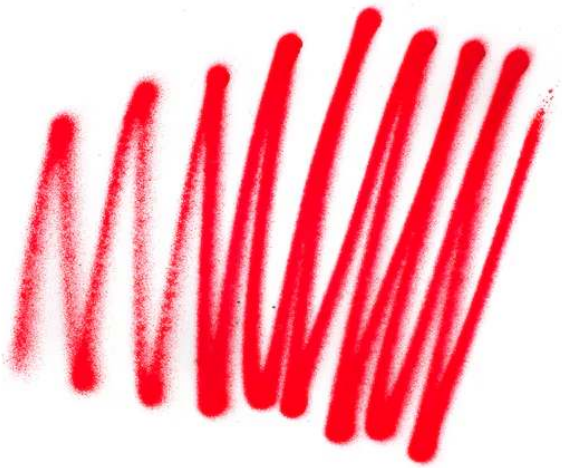
44% of ICs focus on strategic work in the complex space.



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What can we do?

How can we elevate the role of DesignOps to achieve the recognition it deserves?

How can we manage the big disconnect?

We need to focus on *Awareness* and *Intentionality*



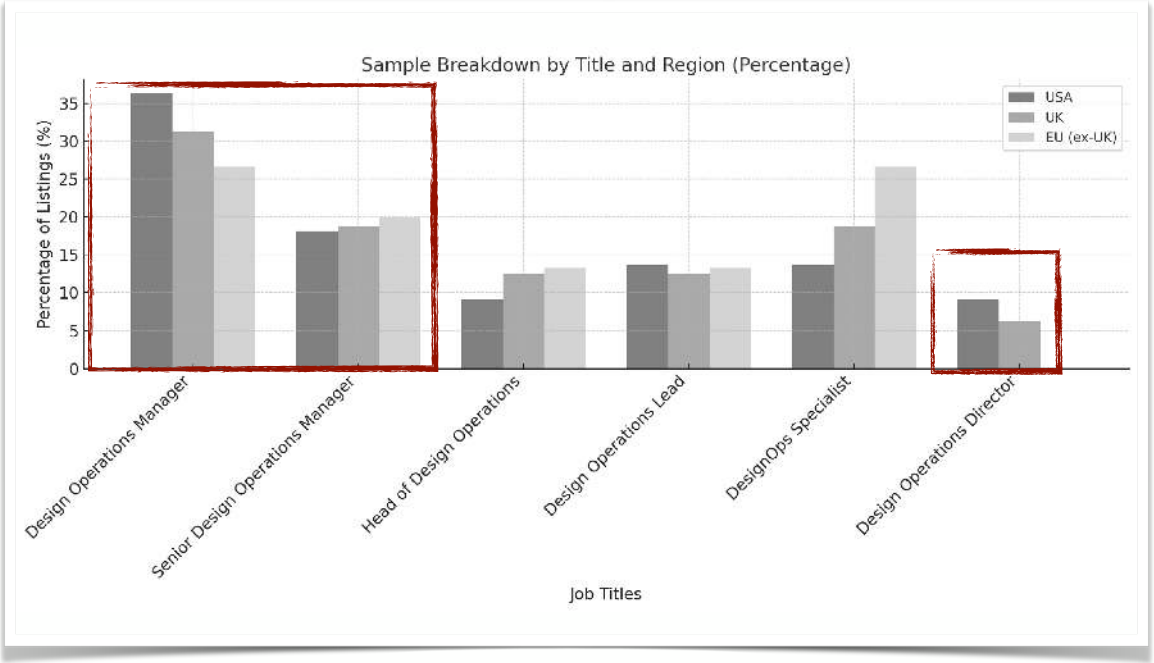
Awareness: Q8: Where is DesignOps positioned?

DesignOps is stuck at the mid-Level

Managers dominate globally (55%+ of roles), but most are ICs, not true managers.

Specialists emerge in the EU, offering a unique career path.

Directors remain rare everywhere



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Ok, DesignOps is not consistently positioned as a strategic business function.

And most designops roles are poorly defined.

But we can become more *Intentional*

Awareness & intentionality

Which Management dimension is your strength and which one is your blind spot?

Managing Down → *Lead teams & drive execution.*

Managing Sideways → *Collaborate with peers for impact.*

Managing Up → *Influence decisions & align with leadership.*



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Down - *Lead & Drive*

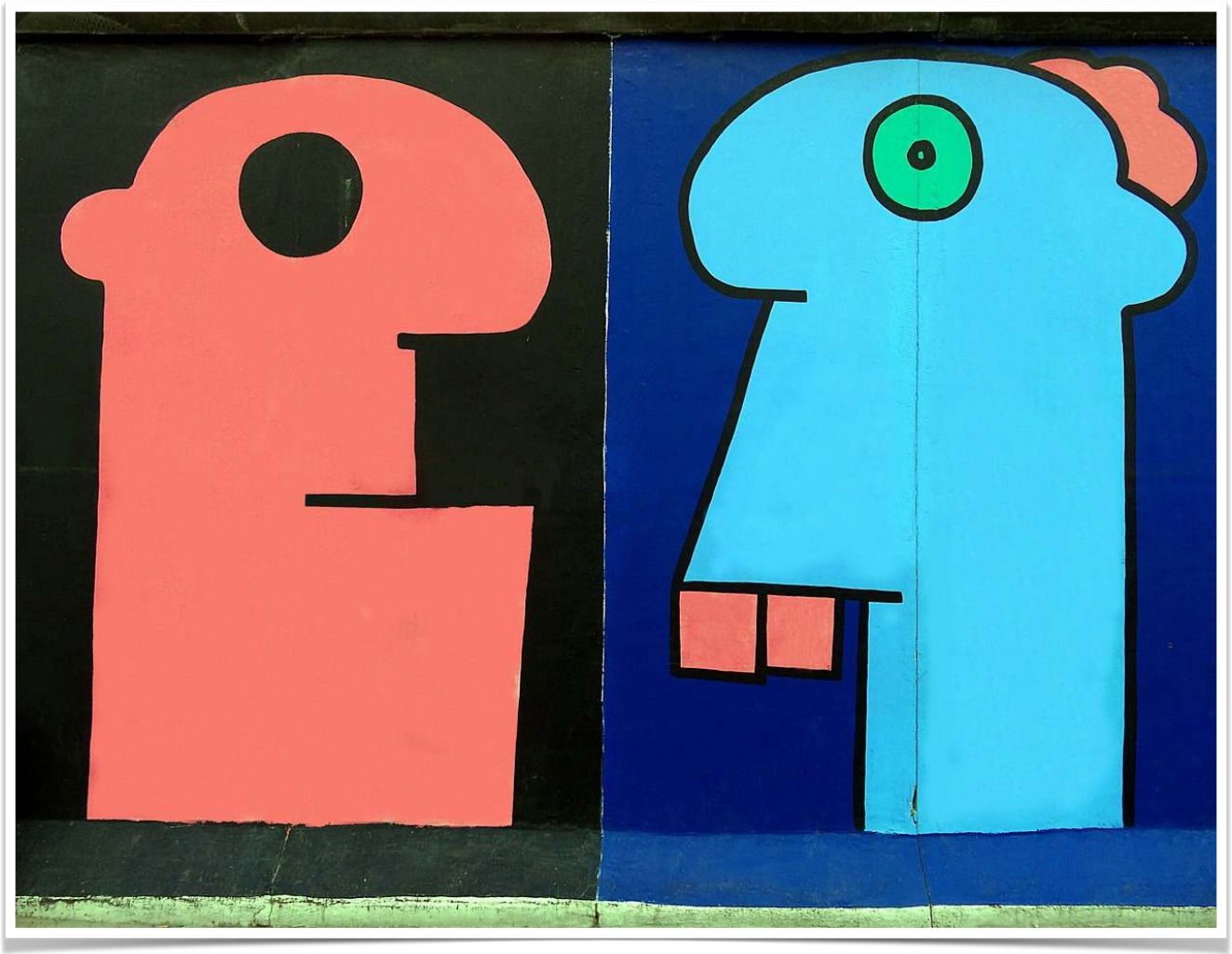
Design Programme Manager: The Tactical Force Driving Output

- Focused on Design Team Health & Productivity
- 15% of global DesignOps roles
  - 15-20% in the US
  - 10-15% in the UK
  - 5-10% in the EU (ex-UK)



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How much time is your design team spending in non-design tasks?

Measure, act, and drive efficiency.

Managing downwards means having an impact on productivity and team engagement and happiness

Sideways - *Collaborate*

Cross-Functional Leadership focused on

- Focus: Outcome-driven, impact on the R&D org (beyond design)
- Reality: 55%+ of DesignOps roles are labeled as managers, yet most are individual contributors.



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Managing Sideways means finding shared pains across teams and multiply impact.

How can we improve prioritisation and increase delivery as planned?

Find common ground and drive the impact.

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Who are DesignOps leaders' real *peers*?

Head of,
Director,
VPs

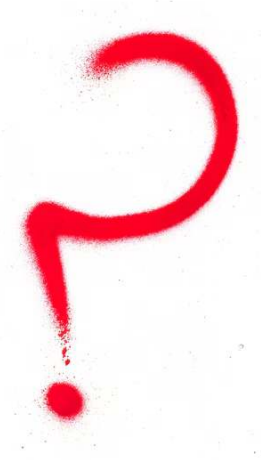
Of
Product Management
Programme Management organisation
Marketing
Procurement
Finance

DesignOps Drives transformation across processes and workflows.

To be successful it must connect with decision makers.

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DesignOps failed to build a consistent path to leadership.

It acts as a leader but without the power.

Product/UX design has a clear career path. DesignOps doesn't even have a map.

Up - *Influence*

Transformational impact beyond Design and the R&D organisation.

When was the last time you spoke with a C-executive or the CEO?



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Find the blind spots and own the transformation through Design Thinking.

What are the opportunities of the business that are being overlooked?

And what is the impact none is talking about?

Build the business case and drive transformation across the org.

Design Operations is a double play:

it's not just *operations* FOR design

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it's Design Thinking FOR operations and the organisation.



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The EAA is coming into force in 4 months.

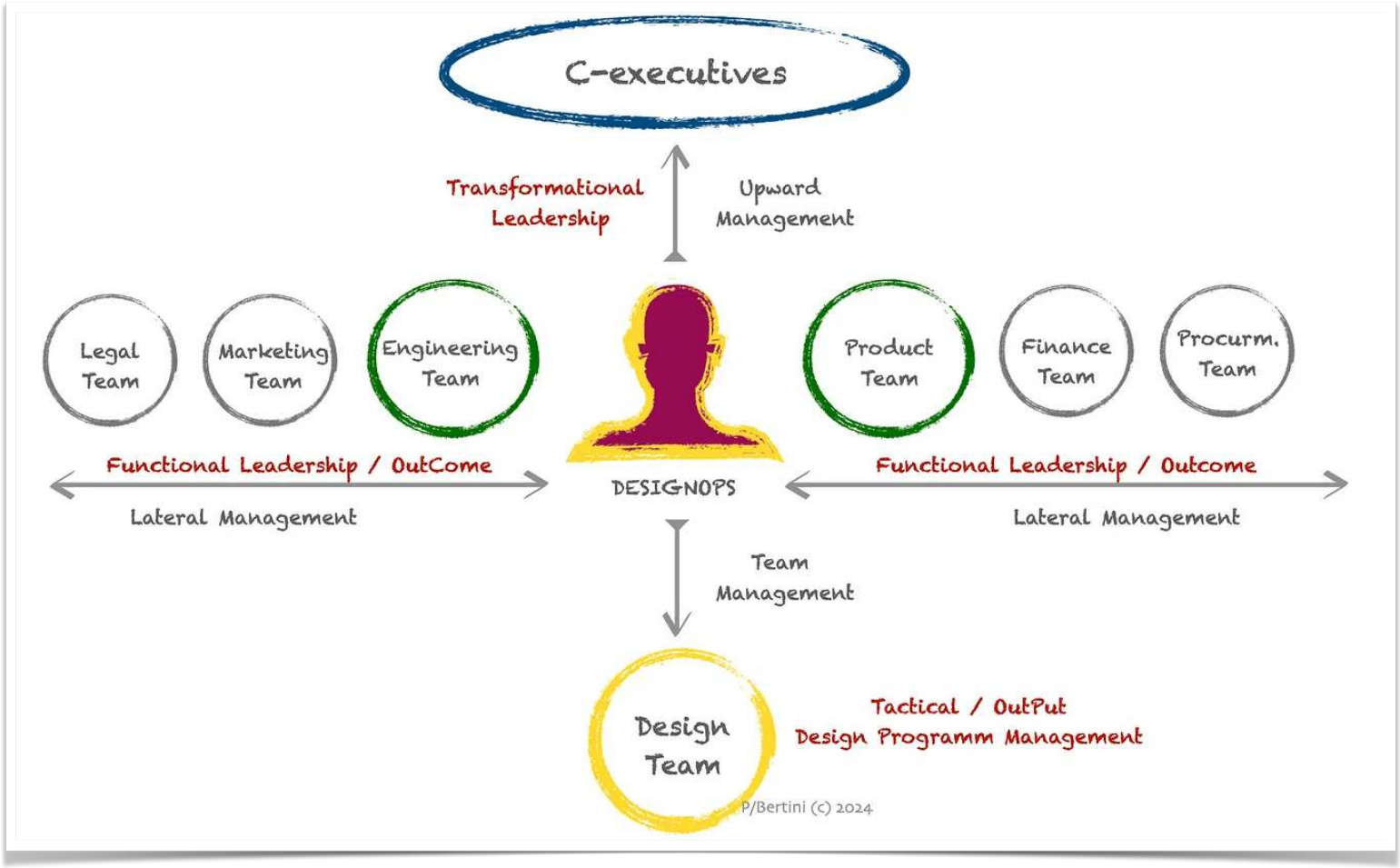
Who in your organisation is ensuring your digital experiences align with the new requirements?

DesignOps isn't just innovation accelerator,

it's innovation *architect*, ensuring new ideas align and are empowered by legal constraints.

A real case study of DesignOps transformative power

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Where are you? | And where do you **want** to be?

DesignOps
cannot operate on
multiple altitudes
simultaneously.

It would lose ***credibility***
it would not be ***sustainable***
It would hinder ***IMPACT***



Is DesignOps Ready for Strategic Business Leadership?

To move forward, DesignOps needs to ***INTENTIONALLY*** elevate its strategic voice and ***OWN*** its transformation within the Org.



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Awareness & Intentionality are key.

Yet, there *may* be a third option…

Experiments never end.

The most exciting ones?
They're the experiments you don't see *yet*…



Credits

Original Concept & Vision
Patrizia Bertini

Research Design & Methodology
Patrizia Bertini

Research Execution & Analysis
ChatGPT
Perplexity

Research Synthesis
Patrizia Bertini

Data Visualisation Specialist
Claude

Quality Assurance & Data Validation
Mistral
Gemini
Claude
Phind

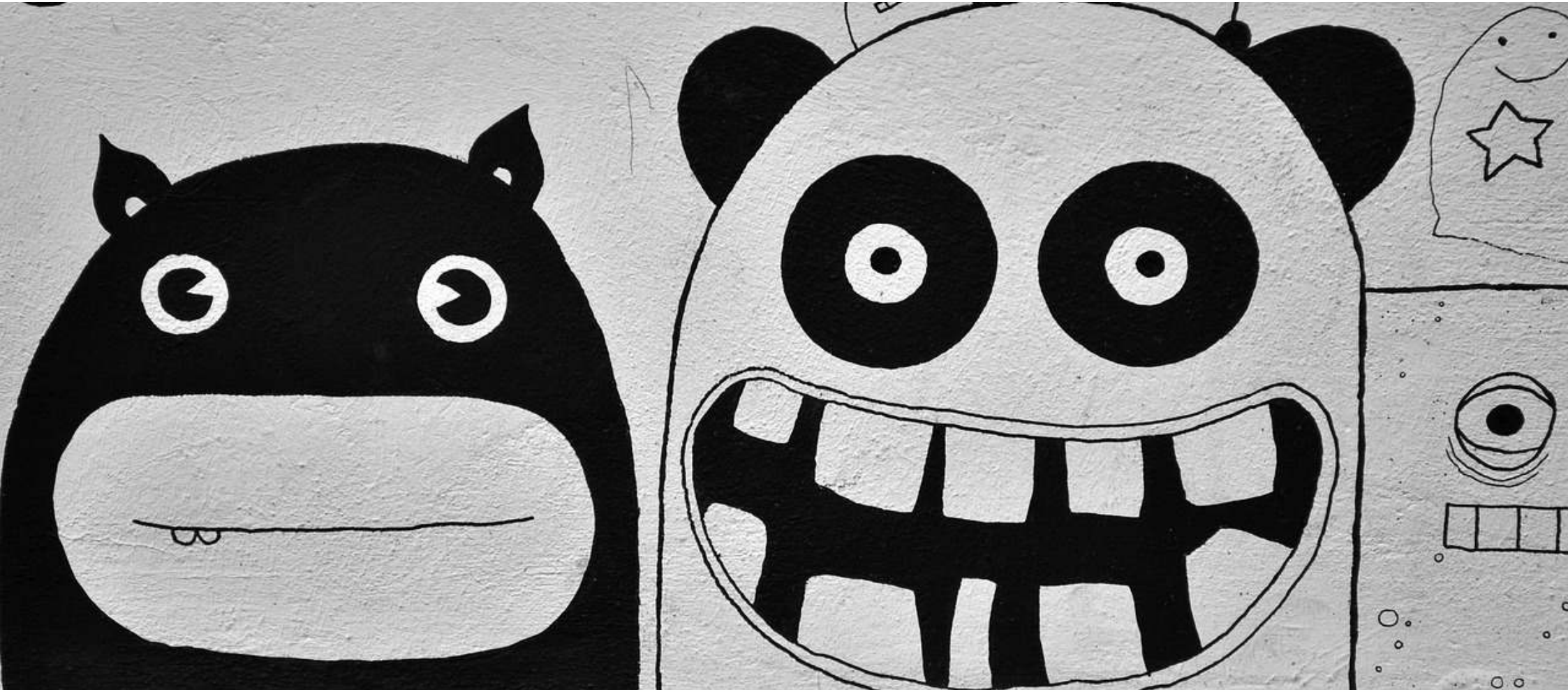
Lead Writer
Patrizia Bertini

Editorial Consultants
Perplexity
Claude

Creative Direction & Visual Narrative
Patrizia Bertini

Visual Assets Courtesy of
Pixabay
Pexels
Unsplash
Freepik

Special Thanks
All AI Assistants who contributed to this project
The amazing tools that made this possible



Thank you!

Questions?

DesignOps & Street Art

Big Impact Needs Planning

Creative Freedom within Constraints

Take Initiative to Create Change

Ask Forgiveness, Not Permission

User-focused Storytelling

Maintenance & Evolution



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