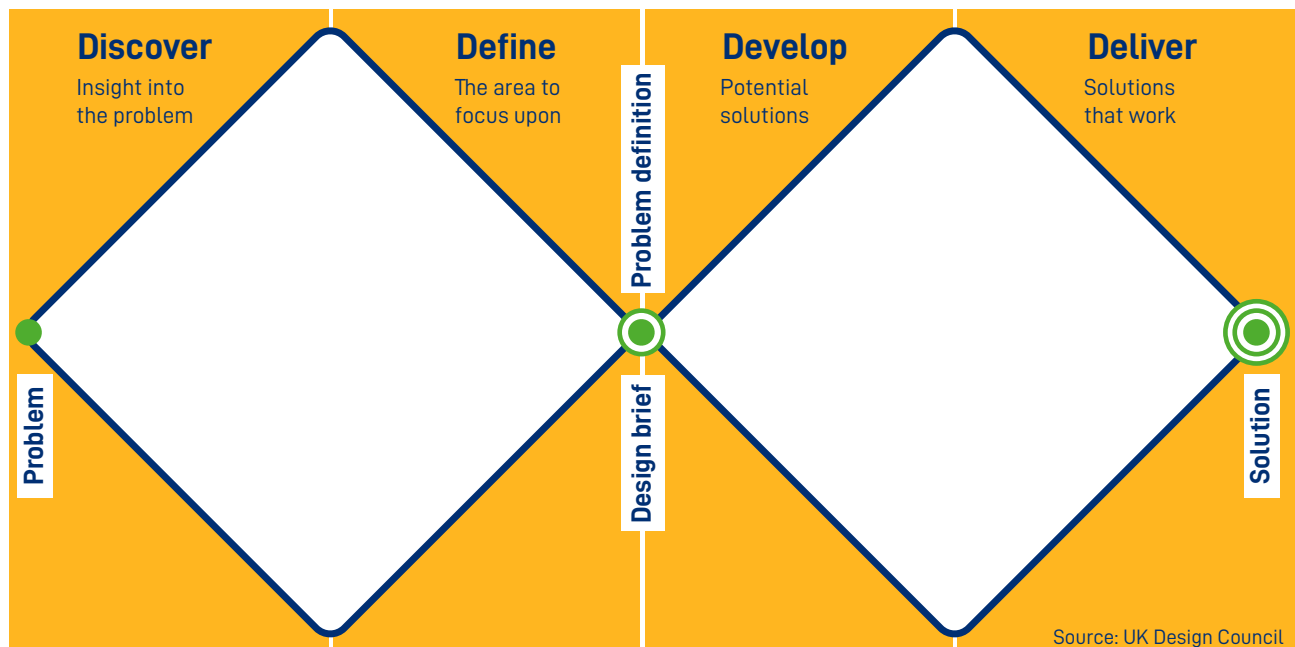


Innovation Support // Managing the Design Project

This guide will help you to manage your design project effectively by understanding the design process, enabling you to be prepared and plan your time and resources to deliver the best solution.

Design Process

Every designer has a process that guides the delivery of a project. This is usually shared in the project proposal and is described in a series of stages. The UK Design Council's Double Diamond is a useful illustration of a generic design process. The widening diamond shape represents divergent thinking (thinking broadly and generating ideas) and the narrowing shape illustrates convergent thinking (distilling information and decision-making). The first diamond provides clarity on the purpose and intended outputs of the project to ensure the right problem is explored – framing the problem or opportunity. The second diamond relates to developing concepts and potential solutions and delivering a final output. There are two stages in each diamond:



Discover: This initial stage is outward-looking and includes interrogating the initial brief and information-gathering from a range of sources to better understand the issue or opportunity at hand, to generate new insights and inform thinking.

Define: Information from the Discover stage is analysed and distilled to make sense of the data, consider multiple possibilities and determine which problem or opportunity to focus on. This is where the design problem is defined and the design brief (see Guide 1: Preparing for Your Design Project) is agreed.

Develop: Multiple ideas are generated to address the design problem. Prototypes such as wireframes, physical models, storyboards and service blueprints are used to communicate and assess ideas. Testing early and often helps ensure the concept aligns with the requirements of the brief, and reduces the risk of taking forward an idea that is flawed or less than optimal.

Deliver: The ultimate phase of the design process includes the finalisation of the solution, its production and its implementation. Ideas are worked up in more detail and tried and tested to ensure they meet user/customer needs and are on target to achieve the intended goal.

In practice, the stages of the Double Diamond vary in time, effort and resource required: not all projects require detailed research or exploration, and others may have a very complex and protracted implementation phase. Each project is different and will have a different shape – the diamonds are not always symmetrical.

During each stage the designer will use a range of methods, approaches and tools to arrive at the best solution. Ask your designer if they have an infographic or visual illustration that can help you be prepared for each stage and understand their process. Some designers use the stages to structure their proposal and costs. Ask your designer for clarity if you are unsure how they relate.

Project Planning and Milestones

To plan effectively, you will need a timetable with details of the duration of each stage of the design process. For example, you'll want to know when you might need to provide access to customers to test ideas, when stage-gate meetings will be scheduled to ensure the project is on track, by what stage you will need internal approval, and when you will see the expected outputs. The activities can be mapped onto a project schedule or Gantt Chart showing key dates for project updates, customer testing and feedback, approvals, specific milestones, and deadlines. More complex projects will require more time and may include additional project management tools such as critical path analysis.

Remember that changes to the brief can affect delivery timescales and increase costs. Where input from stakeholders is required (eg for approval or testing) make sure they are briefed in advance as delays can affect the schedule and the ability of the designer to meet agreed deadlines.

Customer/User Focus

Core to the success of a project is meeting the needs of users. Your customer may not be the end user, so it is necessary to be clear about who you are selling to as well as who will use your product or service. The design process has the users' needs at its centre, and involving users directly at relevant stages, for example in research and prototype testing, can help ensure success. If limitations on time, budget or accessibility impede access to customers or users directly, then personas can help. These are fictional characters or archetypes that represent customer or user groups and allow you to consider their needs, motivations and expectations. Ask your designer to help you create a persona for each of your main customer/user groups using existing qualitative data, which can be augmented with online information and interviews. For each persona you will want to include brief descriptions of their work and home life, personal goals and motivations, as well as the things that irritate or annoy them, and how you will communicate with them.

Involving Stakeholders

Your project is likely to involve stakeholders who can influence the success of the project. Consider who you need to have on board, and involve them at the appropriate stages in the design process: in creating the brief, conducting research, testing prototypes, at project update and approval, and for final sign off. To keep the project on track, ensure that the team is consistent and that decision-makers are fully informed and involved at each stage. This will help avoid uninformed and untimely responses that can lead to frustration and delays.

Who to involve depends on a number of factors including the size of your organisation, the strategic importance of the project, and the scale of investment. As a small business, you might involve a business partner, an investor or a mentor who is familiar with your business, or a 'critical friend' to provide an objective, external perspective. For larger organisations, involving from the outset internal stakeholders such as marketing, production and finance teams can help ensure buy-in when needed, with contributions from other stakeholders, such as users and customers at the appropriate stages.

Communication

Good communication is critical to the effective management of any project. Identify who will be the key point of contact in your organisation for the project. Keeping in regular contact with your designer helps build rapport and understanding between you. It allows the designer to gain deeper insights into your business and your motivations, and can enhance your understanding of the design process.

Selecting the Final Design

Your designer will draw on their professional skill and judgement, and either present their rationale for a single solution in response to the brief, or suggest options for you to appraise and prioritise. It is important to remain objective: selecting the final design should be based on meeting the needs of the customer/user and your business aims, not personal preference. Refer to the brief and use personas or customer feedback and market information to help. The ultimate success of the design will be dependent on whether or not it meets the business objectives set in the brief.

Top Tips

- > **Understand the process** – get familiar with the design process used by your designer and what is expected at each stage
- > **Changes have consequences** – changes made to the brief can affect the cost and delivery time of the project, as can delays in giving the designer the information required
- > **Focus on the user** – involve users (or personas) where appropriate and consider how user needs are being met when making decisions
- > **Involve the influencers** – ensure you engage those who can affect the success of the project at the relevant stages
- > **Be objective** – design decisions should be guided by the brief with a focus on the user and the business aim
- > **Build the relationship** – maintain contact with the designer and nurture shared understanding.