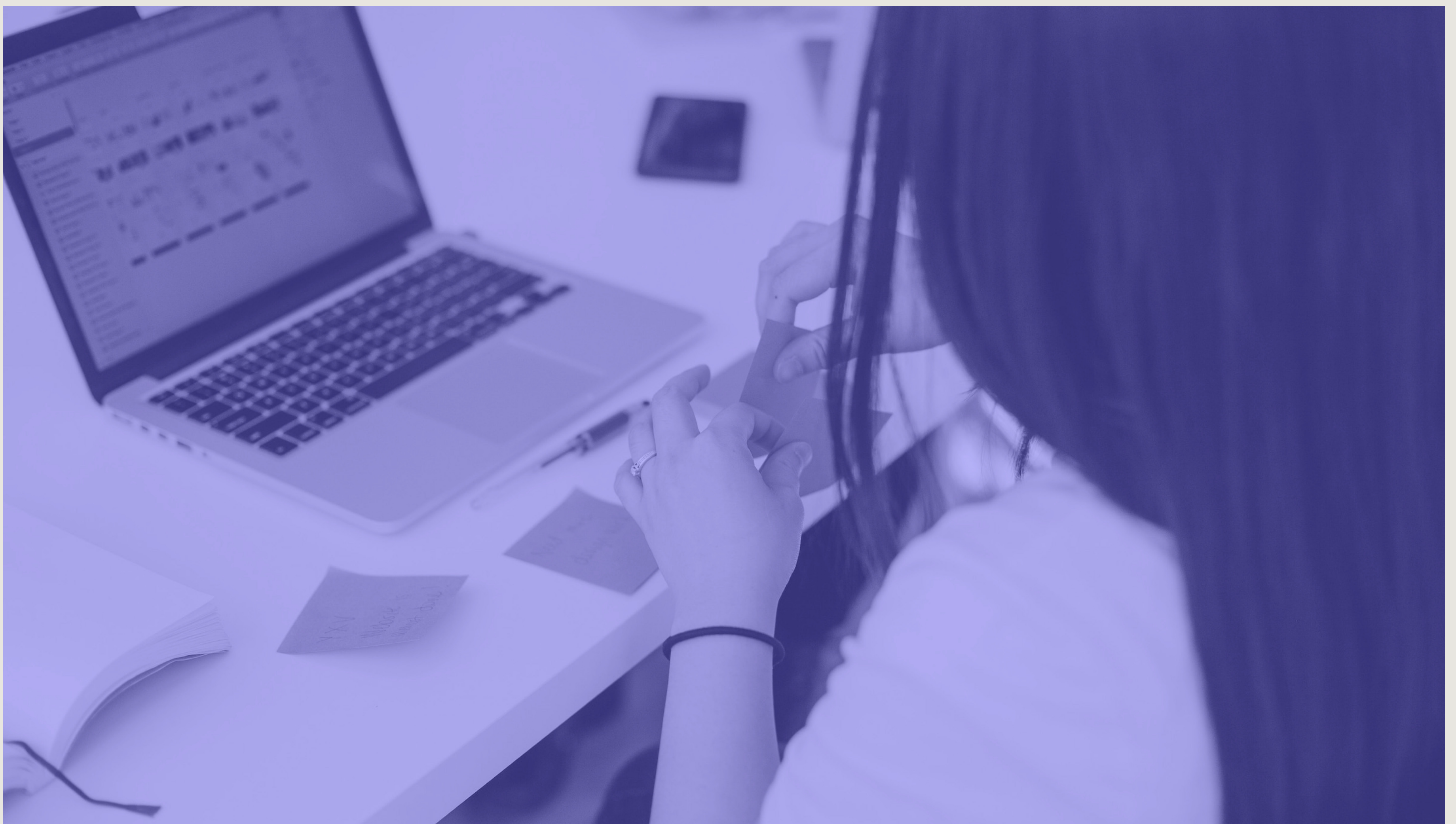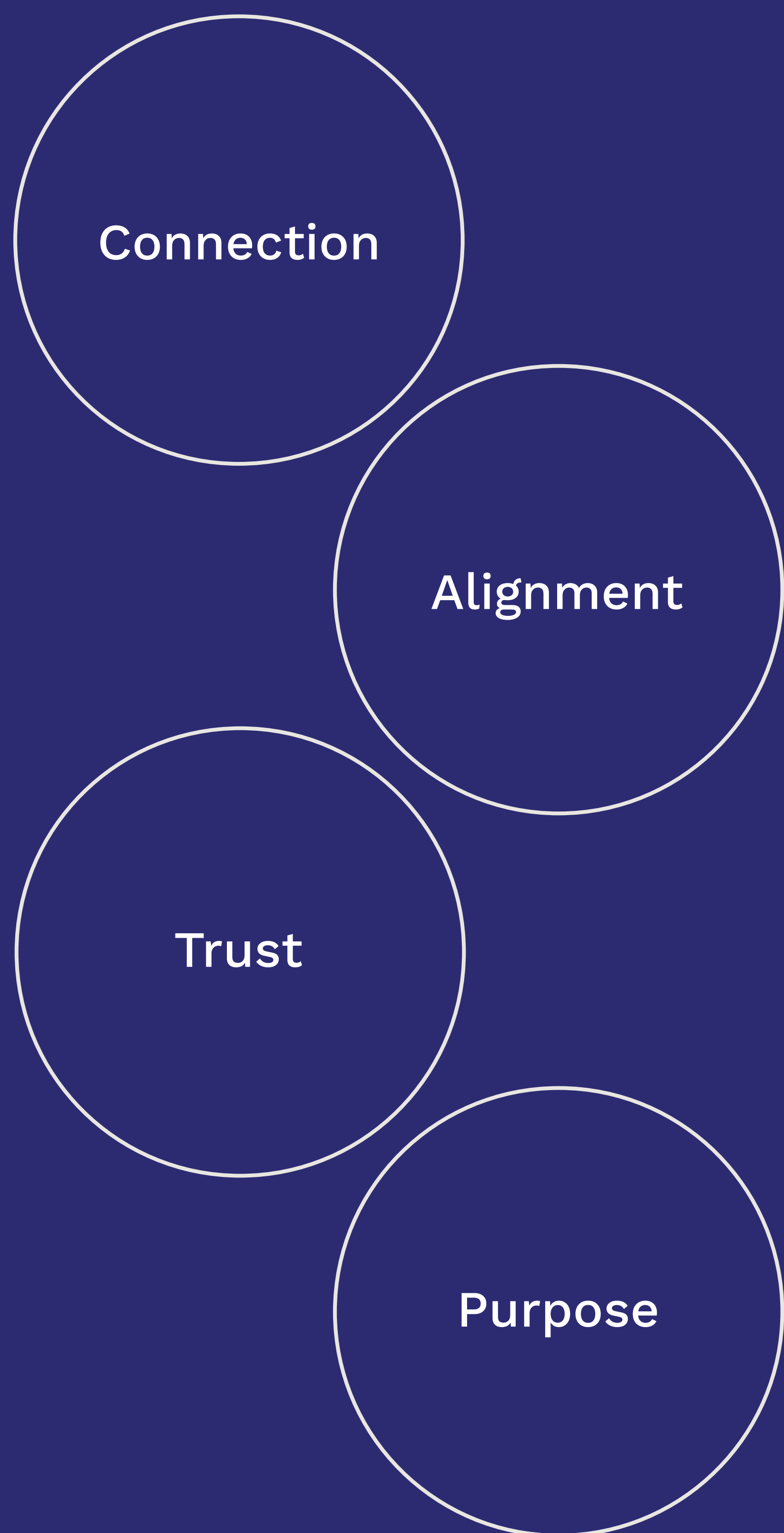# Design the right foundation for high-performance teams.

How new ways of working could transform your business.

XISY

What does Ways of Working actually mean?

Connection

Alignment

Trust

Purpose

'Ways of working' is the recognition of the *how* behind what we do.

Because the *how* is critical to your ability in delivering the *what* when it comes to the value your business offers and your differentiation and success in the market.

Largely, businesses have been focused on planning, strategy and results - AKA the what. Instead, ways of working puts a focus on what has to happen in order to get those outcomes in the most efficient, transparent, engaging and impactful way.

Ways of working is about the connection, alignment, trust and purpose we can create for the people in our business, as much as it is about the speed, momentum, delivery and progress it enables.

It's a recognition by business leaders that the world is changing, and to be attractive to the right people - and to get the best out of them - businesses need to be responsive to both societal and technological shifts.

And it's an understanding that leaders need to be clear, involved and in consensus about their goals, and intentional in how they're reaching them.

The last couple of years have accelerated some changes in how organisations approach new ways of working. But to mistake the present day for our destination risks designing systems and practices that will be out of date just as they're being implemented.

That means you cannot take a set-and-forget approach to ways of working. It's a life-long investment for your business.

We see the best approach to getting ways of working right as a trifecta of:

- Doing the right thing.
- Doing the thing right.
- And then continuing to run and evolve your business with sustainable, business-as usual practices that support a future-fit organisation that's continually improving.

How do you know if your ways of working need attention?

You might...

- be feeling like your team isn't particularly efficient
- have realised that they're doing too many manual tasks
- be struggling to find or retain the right people
- have low employee engagement and high turnover
- struggle with internal communication or the movement of information around your organisation
- not be getting the value you expect from your people; or
- not be delivering projects or outputs on time

...And be wondering 'how do we fix this?'

It starts by recognising that the *real* issue is a lack of connection to an outcome or goal.

We see leaders with smart teams of people who are working hard, and yet their output and innovation is not being reflected in their product or customer satisfaction. Too often, speed, not quality, has become the measure of success.

If that sounds familiar, it's likely you've been focusing on measuring outputs and initiatives, but not how they relate to your goals and the impact benefits they are providing - and even more likely that there's a lack of consensus on what those goals actually are.

Where has it gone wrong?

Firstly - and probably the most common - is the "us and them" narrative between product/tech/delivery/business services and the rest of the business. This is a symptom of lost trust through the lack of, or poor, execution in framing goals in the first place.

Secondly, a lack of metrics linked to strategic goals and/or a clear understanding of the jobs to be done within the business makes it difficult to realise actual goal-oriented outcomes.

Do the right thing

Identifying actions to achieve impact, relevance and quality, and measuring what matters.

A key first step is to make sure you're crystal clear on organisational goals and how they are being measured. That doesn't mean taking a guess yourself. It means getting in a room and agreeing with the stakeholders what the goals are. Moreover, a key step is to agree which goal is more important 'even over' the others. No organisation can focus equally on all strategic goals simultaneously, and markets change all the time.
Which is why the first question to figure out is:

What's the best, *most impactful thing we could do to improve our business today?*

Often there's a lack of effort that goes into validating whether the actions or initiatives we're undertaking, or need to take, are actually the right thing to do to move us closer towards our goals.
As an executive, you might have an idea about what you think is causing challenges or bottlenecks in your business. And the thing is, when we think we know the problem, we can assume we know the solution. But, you know what they say about assumptions...

Which is why doing the right thing starts by applying the principles of design thinking, or, human-centred design, to actually understand what's happening for your people, first.

Using things like user-centricity, co-design and ethnography (understanding), we can better understand the real-world problems your people are experiencing that are getting in the way of them doing their best work for your business. This includes learning from their thoughts, beliefs, needs, pain points, motivations and behaviours.

For example:

We worked with a large New Zealand retailer that was experiencing inefficiencies in their merchandising function. The business needed external support to explore where these inefficiencies were, the magnitude of the impact to their businesses and what they could do about it. Our engagement began by giving the people in the merchandising team the time and space to actually voice their experiences, to be heard, and to be a part of the process of solving the problem. It not only helped this retailer understand the most impactful thing they needed to do (action X will lead to outcome Y), but also created greater accountability and connection to those outcomes going forward for the wider team.

Understanding the **metrics** that matter (our goals), validating ideas (how to achieve those goals) and measuring **impact** of those actions relies on both quantitative inputs and qualitative data.

Data and analytics is an enabler to better ways of working. To do the right thing, we also need to synthesise the qualitative data generated through research by drawing out key insights and patterns from business activity. By accessing business-relevant data, and translating these insights and aligning them with the qualitative information we already know, we can better communicate stakeholder needs and identify a strong case for action where it's needed most.

DFV framework

Desirability

Viability   Feasibility
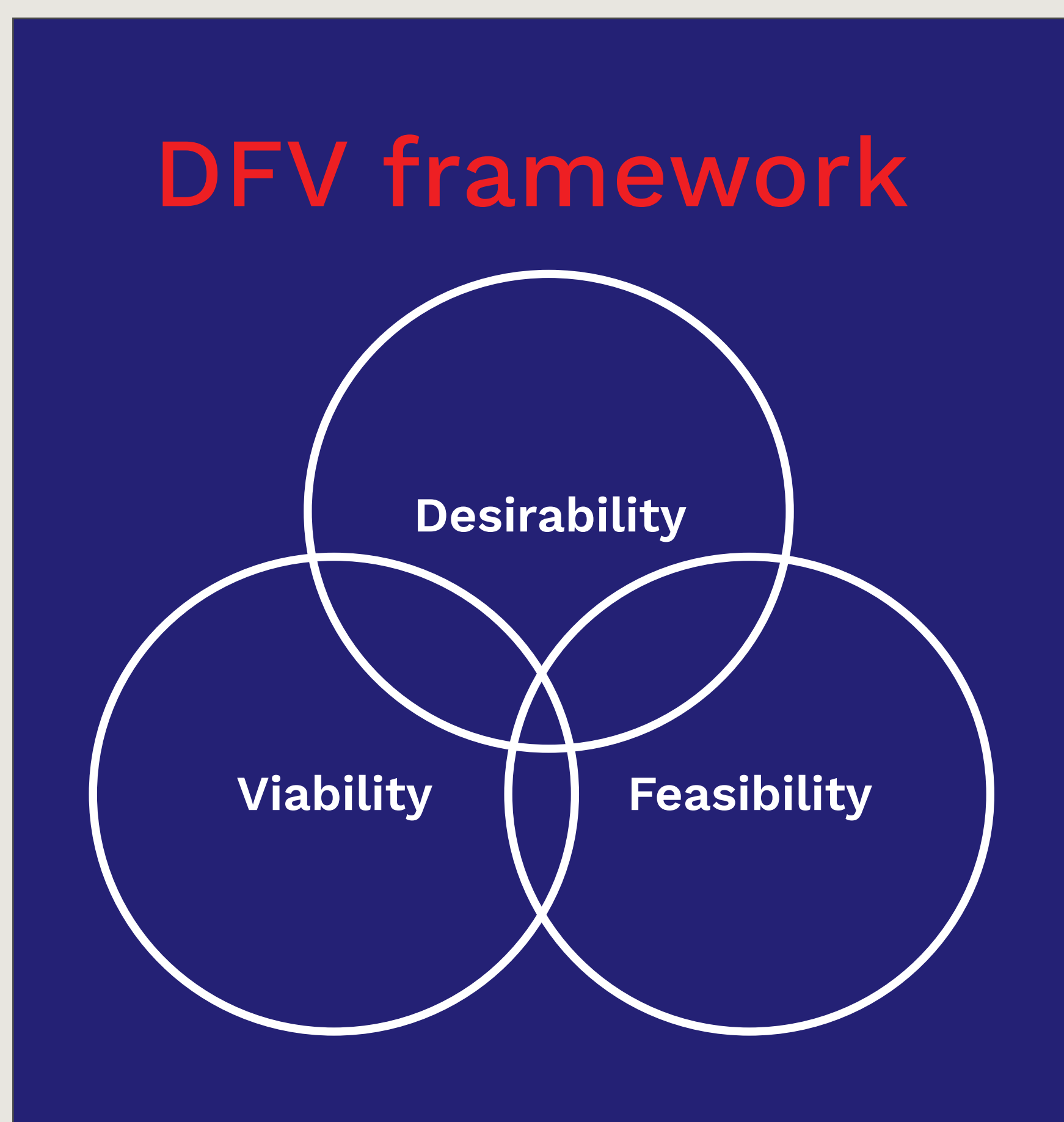
Desirability. Viability. Feasibility.

We encourage our clients to use a DFV framework to structure the process of validating and prioritising ideas, because it runs the continuum between qualitative and quantitative information.

DFV considers an idea's desirability (of users), feasibility (of delivery) and viability (of cost). This approach helps to gather ideas from a broad range of people at all levels, remove subjective opinions and replace them with quantitative data so that only validated ideas are promoted to a delivery team for execution.

Using both quantitative and qualitative data

- gives us more assurance that we're working on the right things

- helps to create stakeholder alignment on what actions need to be taken

- statistically identifies what is happening in a business (and why)

- helps us hypothesise, test and then design against what we know to be true (rather than what we assume)

- allows us to re-check and evaluate the impact of our actions against key metrics

- keeps us accountable to SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely)

- helps us focus on delivery in a sustainable way.
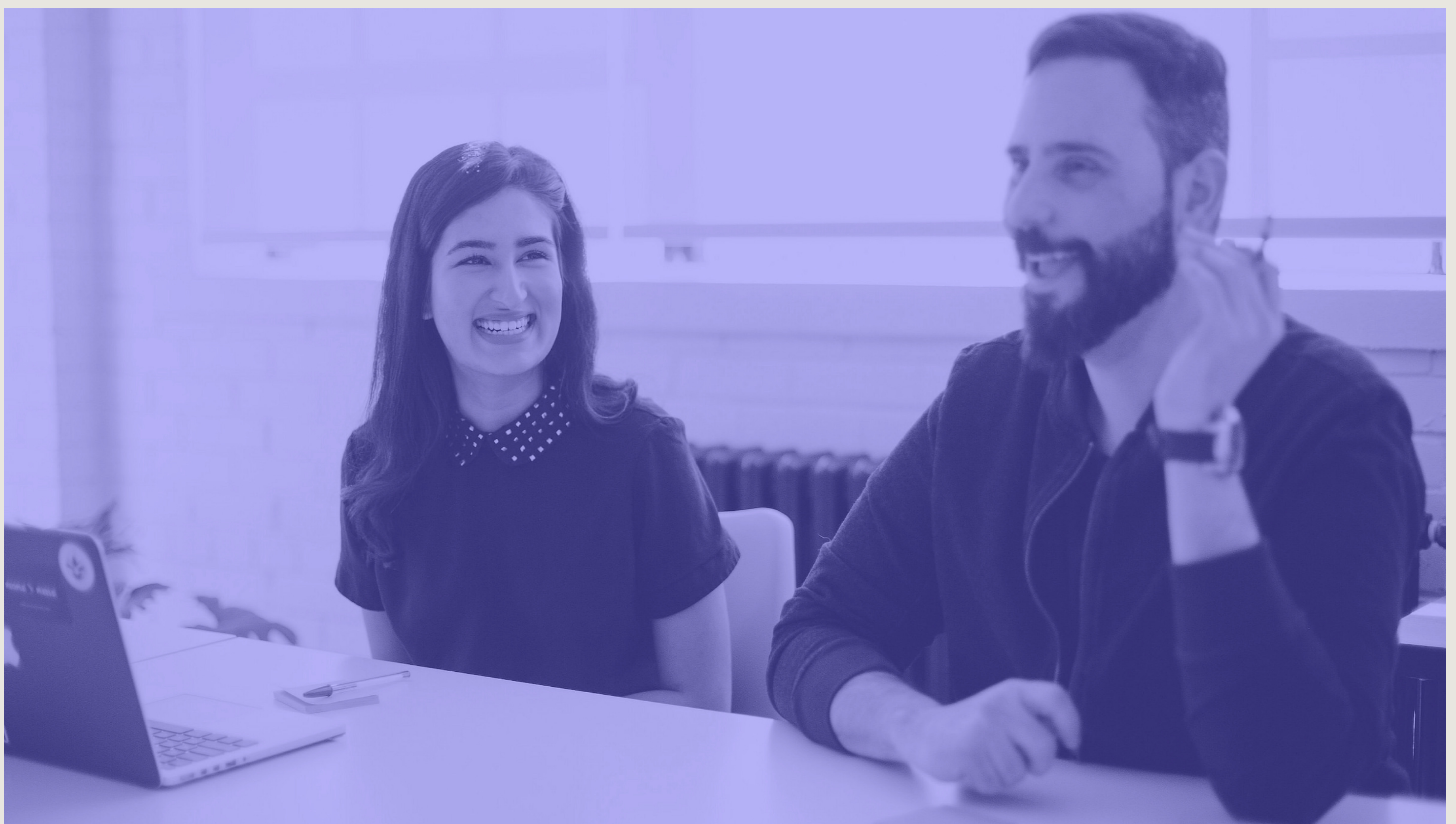
For example:

In the case of our retailer client, we synthesised qualitative data, drawing out key behavioural insights. We then translated these insights into personas and journey maps to help communicate stakeholder needs and behaviours, and identify the key "moments that matter". We were able to provide our client with the data to confirm the impact that inefficient processes were having on their business, articulate the volume of impact as a case for change and communicate a plan for meaningful action toward high value goals. From there, we could prioritise initiatives within each of the "moments that matter" based on effort and impact and define an implementation roadmap.

Do the thing right

Executing with efficiency, transparency and alignment

Once you have clarity about what action(s) will have the most impact, the next step is to get everyone on the same page to do that thing in a meaningful and efficient way. This is about facilitating an environment that enables both speed and quality of work.

Connect employee experience with purpose

Your ability to steer is improved when everyone has a connection to a strong north star. Supporting teams to find purpose in an organisation is critical to engagement and innovation. Find out what your employees care about. Where do they derive meaning? What are their aspirations? What are the things that keep them up at night? Ask them, make sense of what you learn, then identify actionable insights and opportunities for aligning activity with purpose.

Co-create solutions

Work together and co-create ways in which the organisational purpose will connect meaningfully with employees. Bring them into the design process and offer them the tools for change. Many senior leaders underestimate the impact that they can have on their team by being involved in this process too.

Alleviate hierarchical roadblocks

Hierarchy of decision making is often what slows teams down. A strong north star also enables you to push decision making authority to the edges of your business, because everyone has the guardrails they need to align decisions with purpose and goals, and the power to say no to what's not necessary.

Create transparency

Having dashboards of the metrics that matter also provides greater real-time clarity to stakeholders about what you're doing, the progress you're making and the decisions around delivery and impact (rather than reports that just represent a certain point in time). We talk about having a long-term approximate, short-term exact roadmap. It provides short-term detail about what tasks need to be done, while offering enough long-term planning to guide us and keep stakeholders invested.

Check, reflect, check again

Intentional circuit breakers give you purposeful moments to check whether what you're doing is still a good idea, and to recognise what you've been learning through the delivery process. We recommend time-based and milestone-based intervals throughout your project.

For example:

For our retailer client, we facilitated focused idea generation workshops to co-create tools and practices to support more effective and efficient ways of working within each of the "moments that matter". When it came to experimentation and implementation, we prioritised initiatives within each of the "moments that matter" based on effort and impact and defined an implementation roadmap.
This approach meant we could redesign the merch team structure, transforming well-established hierarchies and silos, and implementing new systems and processes to support their new ways of working.

Sustainable, business-as-usual practice

Being a business where people can do their best work

Humans aren't robots. They don't want to work at an office desk from eight to five. Having tasted freedom over the past few years, employees are rethinking what they want out of work. What they're looking for is employment that is a continuation of life, rather than separate from it.

Purposeful work and a sense of appreciation are key drivers for workplace happiness. Physical spaces are no longer a limiting factor for work, and flexibility is the fastest rising job priority in New Zealand. Given the overwhelming war for talent, compounded by the global marketplace we now operate in, businesses need foresight to attract and retain great people.

With these new demands comes an opportunity to reshape and reimagine our workforce and organisations. Among other things, it's a chance to design out inequalities, to narrow the digital divide and to create a diverse and multi-skilled workforce that meets the needs of our rapidly changing world. It's also an opportunity to build anti-fragile systems - systems which thrive in conditions of pressure, uncertainty and volatility.

What do we **need** to consider?

Flexibility is important to people

Globally, more than two-thirds of knowledge workers say their preferred work environment is hybrid. True flexibility refers to both time and location. People want some time at home and some time in an office. They want to schedule flexibility. They want to be able to determine when they work. But simply shifting in-office ways of working to an online environment doesn't work. Leaders need to align on how they can embrace hybrid working while ensuring an equitable experience for all members of their workforce.

Have agreement on guardrails

The more flexible and geographically distributed a workplace gets, the more certainty there should be around exactly what is expected by all parties in a working relationship: we need to make the implicit explicit. For example, you may consider establishing core collaboration hours for in-sync engagement, meeting agreements and accountability guidelines (expectations around delivery and feedback).

How teams collaborate

Cloud based tools like digital whiteboards, shared documents and app integrations facilitate collaboration and help to get the right people in the room, while platforms like Slack and Teams Chat can be used for more social conversations that people miss when they're not in the office. As well as real time banter, these platforms and tools allow for asynchronous engagement where appropriate and the best teams are intentional about their use of them to stay connected throughout the day. The office should be considered a tool rather than as a location - an environment used to solve problems that need face to face interaction, or where you can come together to be social.

Design systems to support how people want to work

We can't predict and control the people within organisations, so we need to make sure that the way we work with them and the systems that we design to support them can respond to that. Be intentional with technology, and match the tech to the task.

Create goal-oriented ceremonies around dashboards

Pick a good metric that represents success and monitor it continuously. Metrics are useless without a 'home', so co-design dashboards that have these metrics built in. Dashboards enable a shared understanding of what people need to do, and help you put ceremony around measuring metrics towards goals - you can come together, understand results, and agree on next action. You don't necessarily need to know everything, but you should be able to find it if you need to.

Create connection through ritual

Put simply, a ritual is any act that is assigned meaning, is carried out at regular intervals and goes beyond just its practical purpose. Rituals promote psychological safety by encouraging connectedness in a team or organisation; they humanise the workforce.

When we feel a sense of belonging and trust with a team, engagement, collaboration and productivity rise - we're more efficient with increased focus, more agile, better aligned to goals and more resilient to change. There are numerous moments to design in workplace rituals. For example, during recruiting and onboarding, meetings, meals, professional development, periods of change (drastic or otherwise) and celebratory milestones.

Recognise that failure is part of the plan

Test ideas, allow for failure and try again. This means making peace with the idea of continuous learning through monitoring and evaluation. As the saying goes - the more reflective you are, the more effective you are - which is why retrospective meetings are an important tool in building a high performing organisation.

Set retrospectives up with enough time for you to try new things and learn, but regular enough so that you don't forget what you've done and how you can do something meaningful about it. This regular process ensures that everyone is staying connected and provides transparency over what's working, what's not and whether or not your actions are moving you forward towards outcomes. Retrospectives are not just about what needs work, but also about celebration.

Redouble your investment in people

Start building the foundations of a future which celebrates workforce diversity, flexibility, ongoing reflective learning and mutual fulfilment for employers and employees.

For example:

To support our retailer client, we set up a suite of rituals - including standups, regular check-ins and retrospective meetings. This improved engagement, retention and impact. By integrating new ways of working, it enabled employees to leverage cross functional teaming and improved collaboration in a hybrid environment. The team are now equipped with a tool-kit to continually adapt in response to the rapidly evolving environments in which they operate. This has created resiliency and efficiency in their operations.

How do you get started?

You can't steer a parked car. In other words, you need to start by starting, and learn by doing. Rather than seeking a detailed plan for the future, iterating now is what is needed. Start small, tweak, probe, sense, respond and change until you make progress and get the results you're looking for.

Of course, it can help to have some guidance to help initiate action and set the right course for results. At X is Y, we co-design new ways of working, supporting leaders and teams to unlock a whole new level of performance.

We'll work with you to find the parts of your system that stop your people from doing their best work and co-create solutions that are future fit.

If you think your business could benefit, we'd love to get the conversation started. Reach out to our team to find out more.

xisy.co.nz