

Bridging the Gap Between Design and Development

A framework for seamless collaboration

created using Design Thinking



mobileLIVE

Understanding 'The Gap'

Most **digital products and experiences**, whether they're e-commerce websites, mobile apps, or dashboards, **are built in siloes** - where developers step in after the design stage. In this all too familiar context, the hand-off between teams assumes all questions are answered, and all challenges accounted for.

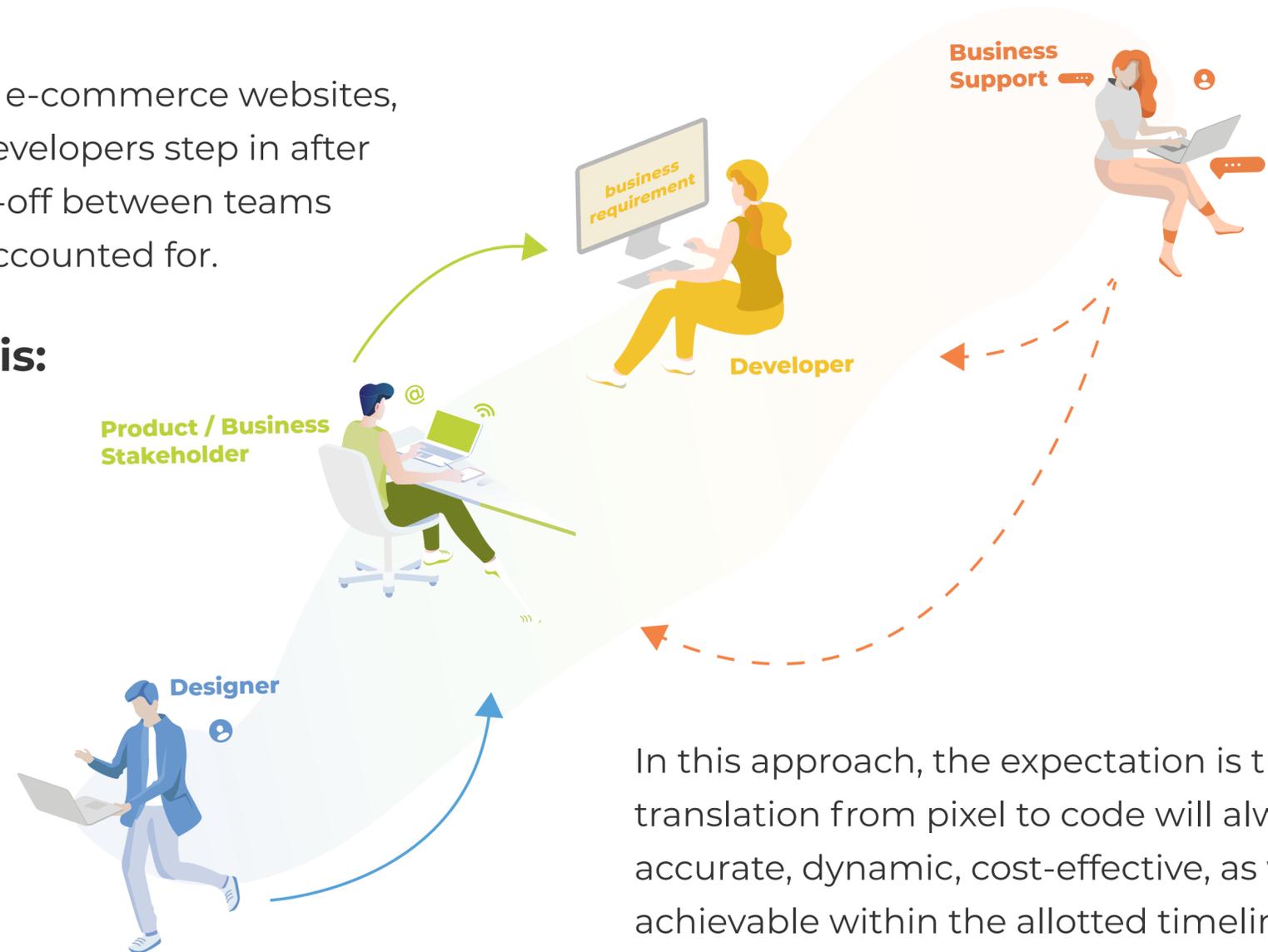
Conventionally, the process happens like this:

Designers are on the front lines trying to understand the users and collect requirements and goals from the stakeholders, expressing these insights in the form of storytelling, journeys, wireframes, and mockups.

Product and Business Stakeholders sign off on the final experience and technical requirements.

Developer receives this information from the Design team and is expected to implement the desired experience into a workable product.

Business Support manage the overall process and act as a liaison for everyone on the project.

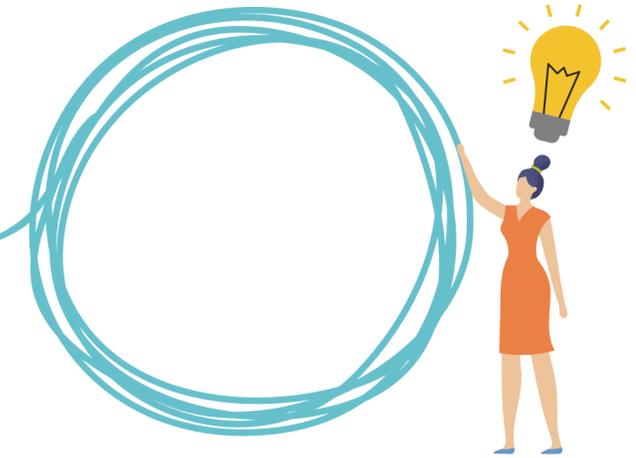
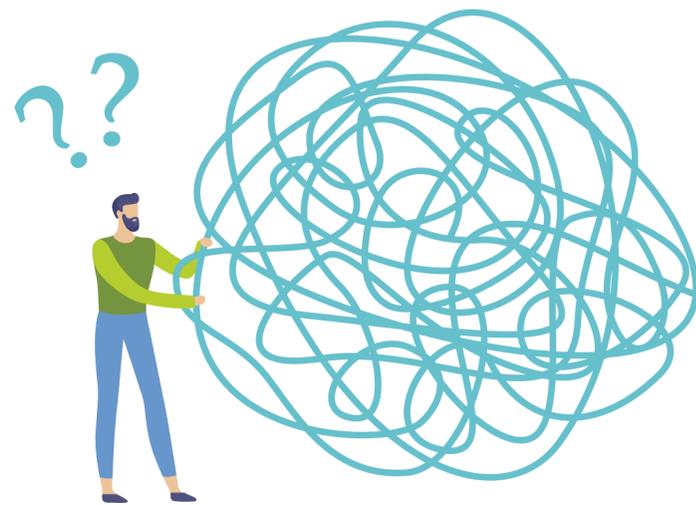


In this approach, the expectation is that the translation from pixel to code will always be accurate, dynamic, cost-effective, as well as achievable within the allotted timeline and budget. However, **this expectation doesn't match the reality** of day-to-day collaboration, where different priorities and methodologies present numerous challenges.

Designers spend most of their time worrying about user interactions and experience, and not on technical implementation.

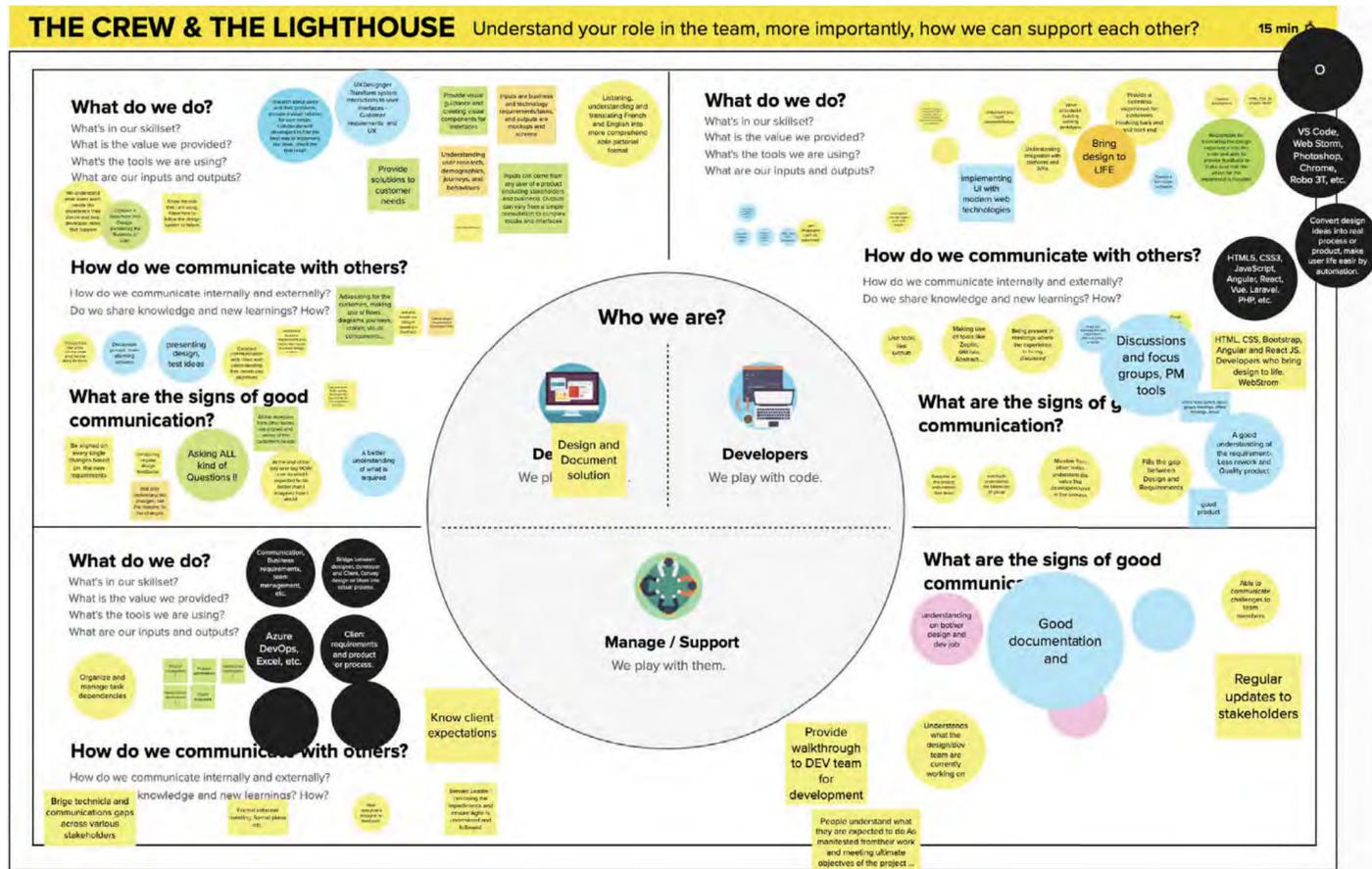
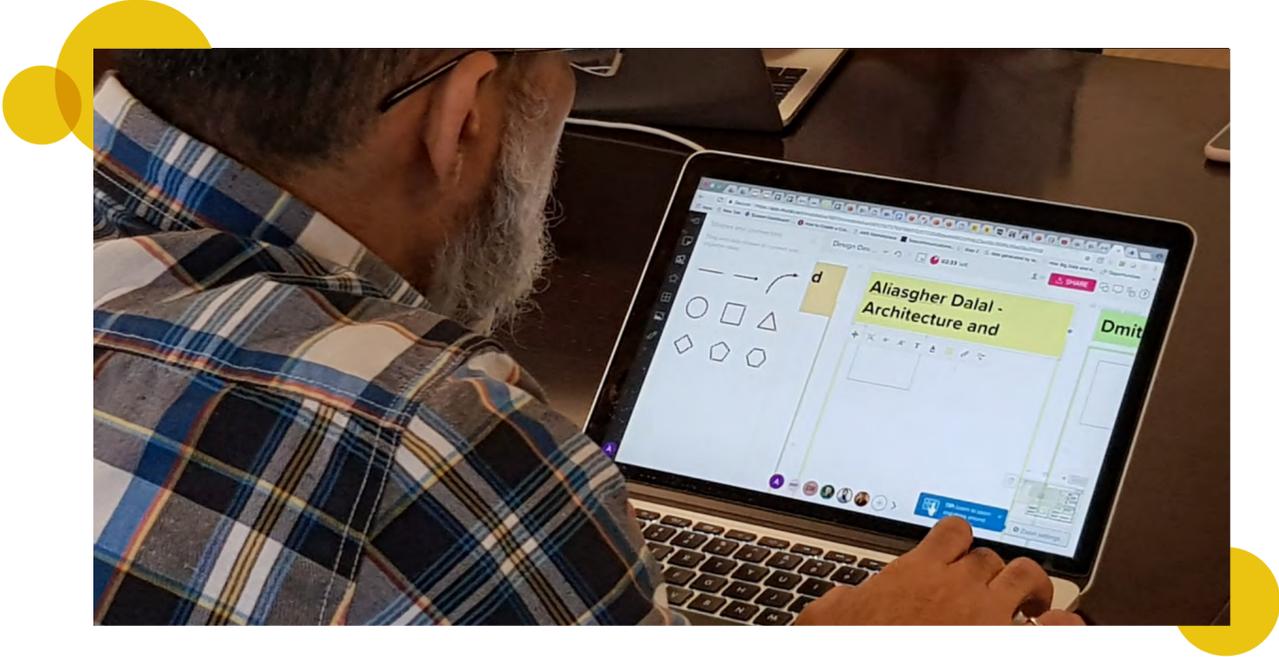
Developers, however, focus on efficiency and timely rolling out the product features, but often lose sight of the end user.

Both of these efforts are necessary, but **budget and time** can be saved if both designers and developers work together to understand each other's intentions and collaborate on an efficient solution.



This gap in expectations ultimately boils down to **poor communication**: Design, Dev, and Business Support all have different sets of skills and ways of working but need constant information exchange between each other to ensure a smooth delivery. **Poor coordination of material and assets** contributes to the breakdown in this information exchange. Just one of these **factors**, or all of them in combination, lead to a low-quality hand-off that has negative repercussions for user experience and drains your project resources.

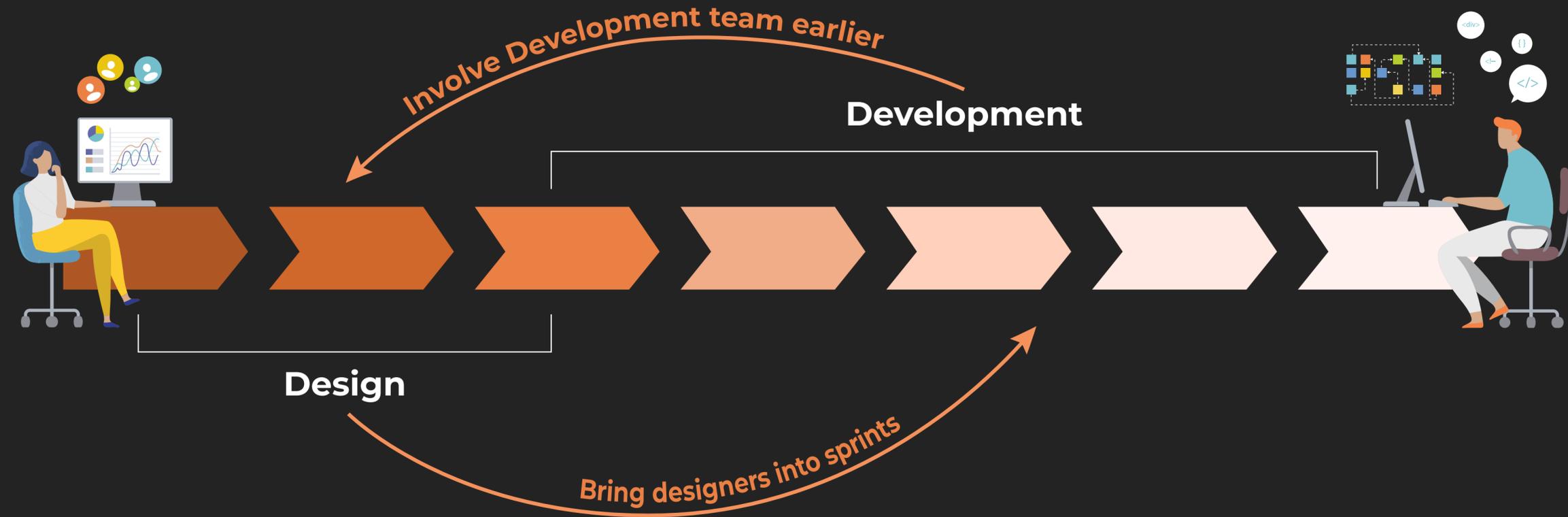
Fortunately, you can overcome these obstacles and **bridge this gap**. Our framework was born from internal workshops, Agile processes, and a proven approach to client projects. We applied our experience **with Design Thinking** to solve these challenges and create a continuum where all team members - Design, Dev, and Business Support - have a clear idea of the client's needs from start to finish.



This framework enables Dev teams to be at the table **much earlier in the process** so they can accurately understand the user and business intent, and create an effective implementation plan. It also enables Design teams to **work alongside them in Agile sprints** to co-create the experience at a granular level. The Design team sees the project through to ensure the product stays user-centred, while the Business Support team **shepherds the process end-to-end** to maintain viability.

Our Framework

The following framework will ensure that designers and developers establish guidelines, speak the same language, work closely, and fill the knowledge gap for a seamless and successful hand-off.



Before the Project:

Use empathy to understand stakeholder roles and responsibilities

Step 1

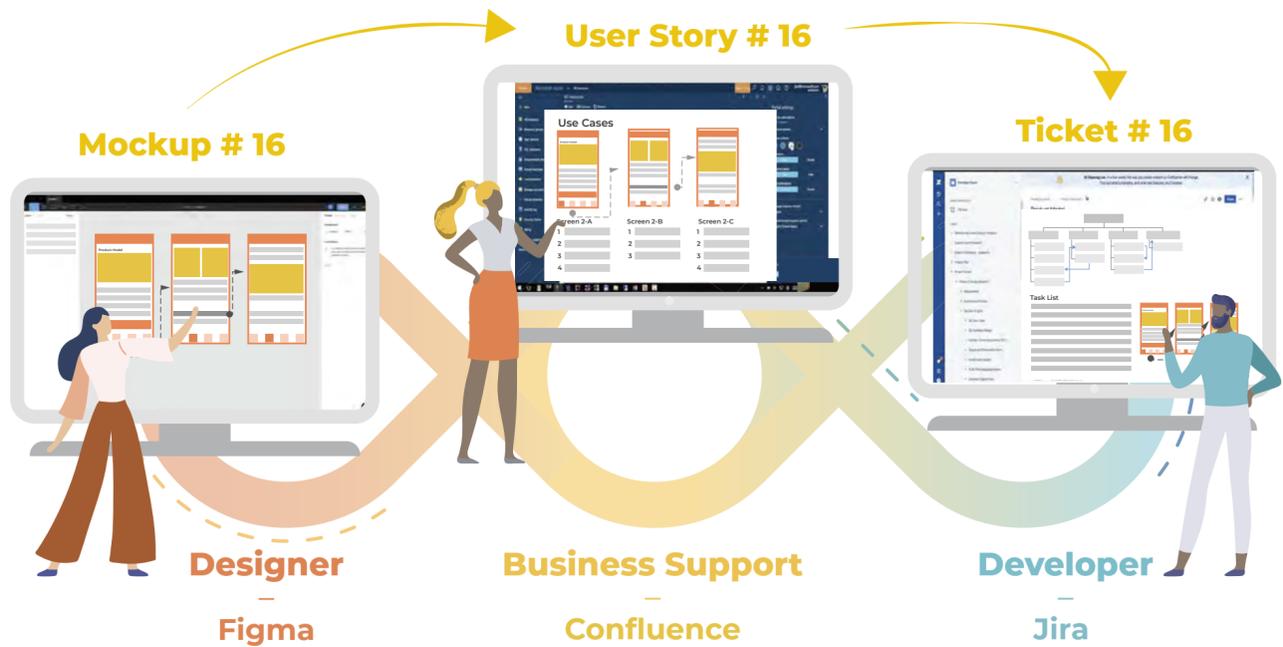


As with any multiplayer project, when you're bringing to life a digital product or experience, it's critical to define the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of everyone involved. Obviously, the stakeholder's expectations are paramount—managed with a dose of realism—but Design, Development, and Business Support teams all must begin any project with assumptions on how the process will go.

Understanding the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved **requires empathy** for how different stakeholders work and the diverse pressures they face day to day. Our framework requires teams to build a shared understanding and empathy before the project even starts.

Establish Empathy and Guidelines

◆ Create a single collaboration space for all updates and documentation for the project and include all Design, Dev and Business Support team members. We recognize that all these teams each use their own tools, but it's important to establish seamless connections between them so that a designer could navigate from a frame, to user stories, to development tickets, and visa versa for a developer.



- ◆ In this collaborative environment, standardize guidelines and conventions for hand-off and file naming between tools, and make sure hand-off packages include key information, including progress, stakeholders, and tasks to be done. You should also introduce better practices for reusable components guided by the 'Don't Repeat Yourself' principle.
- ◆ Additionally, publish set guidelines for completion and moving forward in the Design/Dev process, including who to contact on the team touchpoint when encountering roadblocks or having questions.
- ◆ Have an onboarding process for new team members, including a small demo instead of just having them read documentation, so they build a deeper understanding of user and business intent, as well as gain empathy for the team members involved in the project.

During the Project:

Solve challenges with communication, assets, and materials

Step 2



Empathizing and understanding the responsibilities of each other is just the beginning. Now you can begin to **solve the challenges** faced by the team as they look to make a digital product a reality. This understanding can be achieved through brainstorming and collaboration across four key areas:

I. Roadmapping

II. Alignment and Goals

III. Changes and Updates

VI. Project Team Hand-off

I. Roadmapping - Set the Roadmap

It's important to remember the project you're collaborating on together is likely **just one of many deliverables** each team is shepherding at any given time.

Deadlines must be realistic, and everyone must understand how long it takes for each role to finish their respective milestones. Schedules and deadlines must be established and managed by the Business Support team with an understanding of all the other pressures each stakeholder faces: so they can **match the roadmap to the realistic expectations of the team**.

- ◆ Start with **schedule and budget first**, and work backwards to understand what can be completed within the given timeframe, then negotiate for more time investment in areas of exponential improvement in customer experience or functionality.
- ◆ In your shared collaboration space, **have a common schedule with updates from each team**, so team members can keep an eye on progress and deadlines from one another. Make sure you **visualize your processes** so other team members can easily understand your work.
- ◆ Ensure your roadmap has **additional buffered time** for bugs, changing requirements, and unknown roadblocks that may halt progress.



What are the highest priority screens that can be completed in our timeframe?

Instead of:



How long will it take for designers to complete the required screens?

II. Alignment and Goals - Stay on the Same Page

Even with your roadmap, staying on the same page is still a challenge, especially when there are **multiple stakeholders involved**. For example, if there are basic requirement changes, they must be communicated to all teams, while back-end development challenges should be shared frequently with designers. The objectives and final goal of the project need to be communicated to all teams - Dev, Design, and Business Support - so **everyone is moving forward in the same direction**.

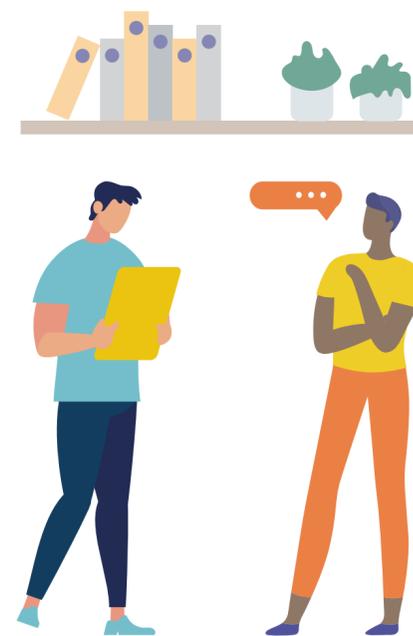
- ◆ In your shared collaboration space, keep an up-to-date document that **summarizes the goals and objective** of your collaboration.
- ◆ Daily standups are an opportunity to keep all team members aligned on these goals for the sprint and communicate any changes. In addition to a quick daily standup meeting between developers, **all team members should connect weekly to sync up and align on goals**, discuss issues and solutions, and plan for the coming week.
- ◆ Maintain **version controls for all phases of the project**, including before and after stakeholder reviews, with each version undergoing QA by the entire team, including developers and designers.

Always on the same page



III. Changes and Updates - No 'Hidden Changes'

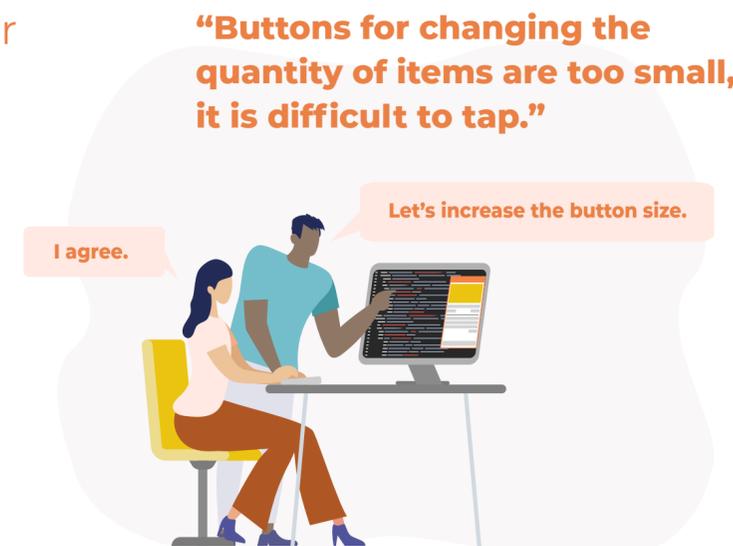
Even the best-planned projects are fluid by nature. As such, not only does the final objective have to be communicated to all stakeholders, but done so with the understanding that the stakeholder's goals may change based on their own business realities. Design needs a method of staying aligned with shifting stakeholder and business realities while also recognizing these changes have a domino effect throughout the delivery process. Not only do these changes need to be articulated to keep everyone aligned, but the reasons for the changes must be communicated, so they are clearly understood and implemented.



- ◆ Document all conversations and changes in project goals or scope, including those outside of meetings, so no information is lost during the process. In addition, properly document all changes in the project, including old or discarded changes so all knowledge can be captured, and it's clear what's changed since the previous mockup. Make sure to keep all of these in the shared collaboration space, so it's accessible by all team members.
- ◆ Standardize regular updates and processes for changing requirements so all changes are communicated across the teams as the design system grows. Keep everyone updated by publishing status updates and make sure core team members are included in frequent meetings so everyone is aligned and aware of the end goal.
- ◆ Designers should communicate a change in requirements with the Development team before changing or updating mockups to tackle implementation challenges and to bring technical expertise earlier into the design.

IV. Team Handoff - Full Picture of Team Hand-off

Passing the project over to the next stage is often when things **fall through the cracks**. This includes articulating nuances and insights the designers have gathered from the client during the design phase. We shouldn't assume Dev will automatically infer everything from the wireframe or mockup, such as the underlying intent or specific goal - making sure customers aren't abandoning their shopping cart before checking out, for example. Since mockups, wireframes, and stories can be **subject to interpretation**, they can cause confusion between team members, so task **descriptions need to be clear and well-defined** because they affect the entire scope of development.



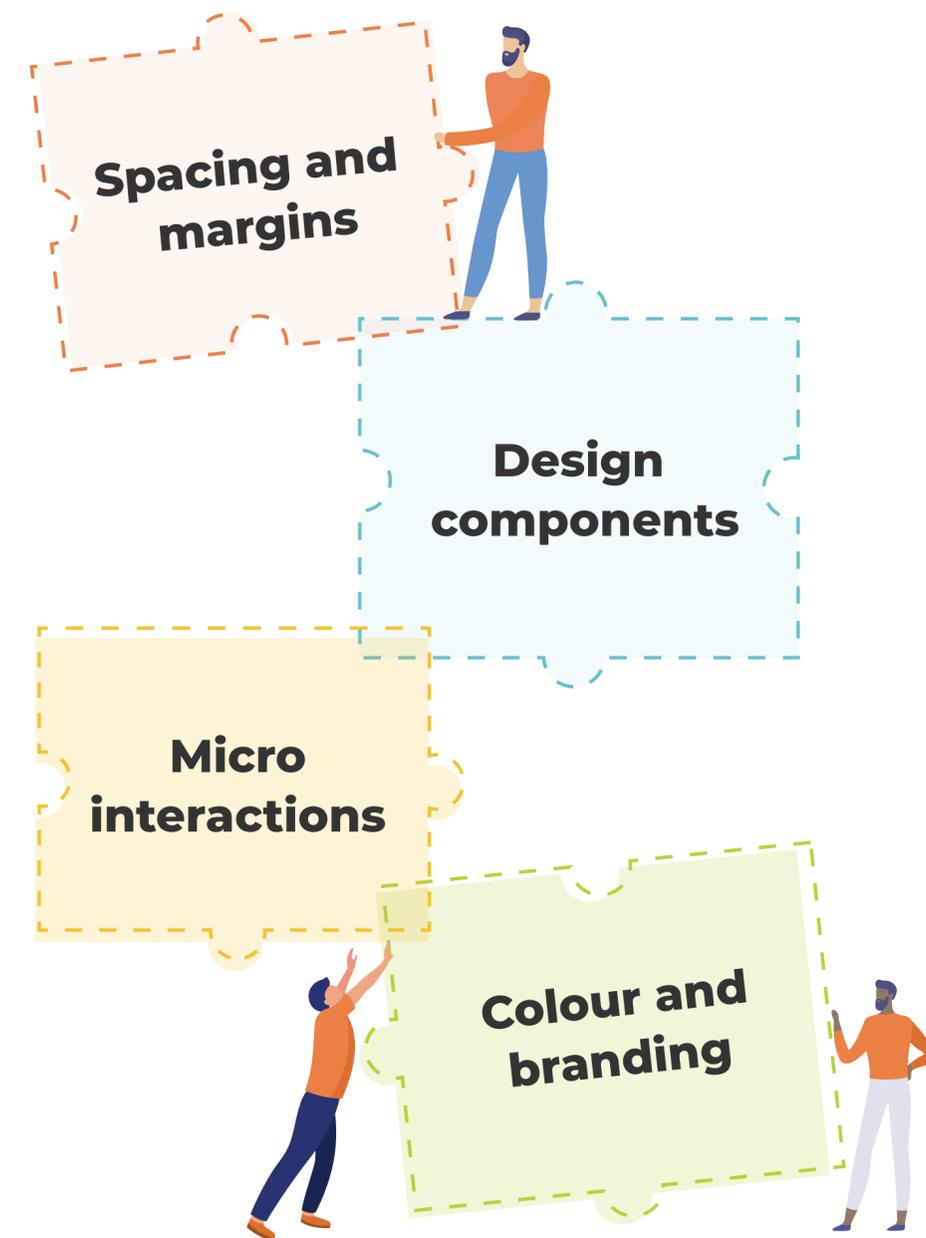
- ◆ **Understand how each team communicates:** designers with journeys, developers with tasks, and provide them with that format. Designers should aim for clarity in communications, so their designs are self-explanatory by providing notes and documentation for all components and screens.
- ◆ You should establish a **standard procedure for handling responsive designs**, including the creation of standards for different screen size requirements. They should also embrace scalable design by building a workflow for handling multiple page sizes and devices.
- ◆ **Turn user insights into guiding design principles** which will help developers keep sight of the user needs and make micro-decisions about implementation.

IV. Team Handoff - Material & Assets

The other practical side of Design-Development hand-off involves a process of handing off project materials and assets between teams.

The **complexity and variety of these materials**, from components, to interactions, to branding, **can cause confusion** amongst team members. Although establishing standardized guidelines will help assist in this task, having detailed and specific granular solutions to handing off materials will enable a **frictionless hand-off**.

At mobileLIVE, we built our **materials hand-off process** around the collaborative tool **Figma**, which we've enhanced with plug-ins and additional software to provide all relevant information between designers and developers.



After the Project:

Ideate and iterate to further improve the collaboration and hand-off process

Step 3



We used **Design Thinking** to address these collaboration challenges and provide solutions, resulting in our Design/Development framework.

However, the story doesn't stop there. The specifics of your organization, the particular circumstances of people and resources, and the scope of each project, provide opportunities to **apply Design Thinking continuously** to your processes to identify ways to further improve the Design/Development workflow.

Fill the Knowledge Gap

- ◆ Hold **weekly learning sessions** with team members to review progress and learn new skills. **Emphasize cross-disciplinary skills** and make sure people learn outside their comfort zone. For example, design limitations can be overcome by making sure everyone has a clear understanding of development, both front-end and back-end.

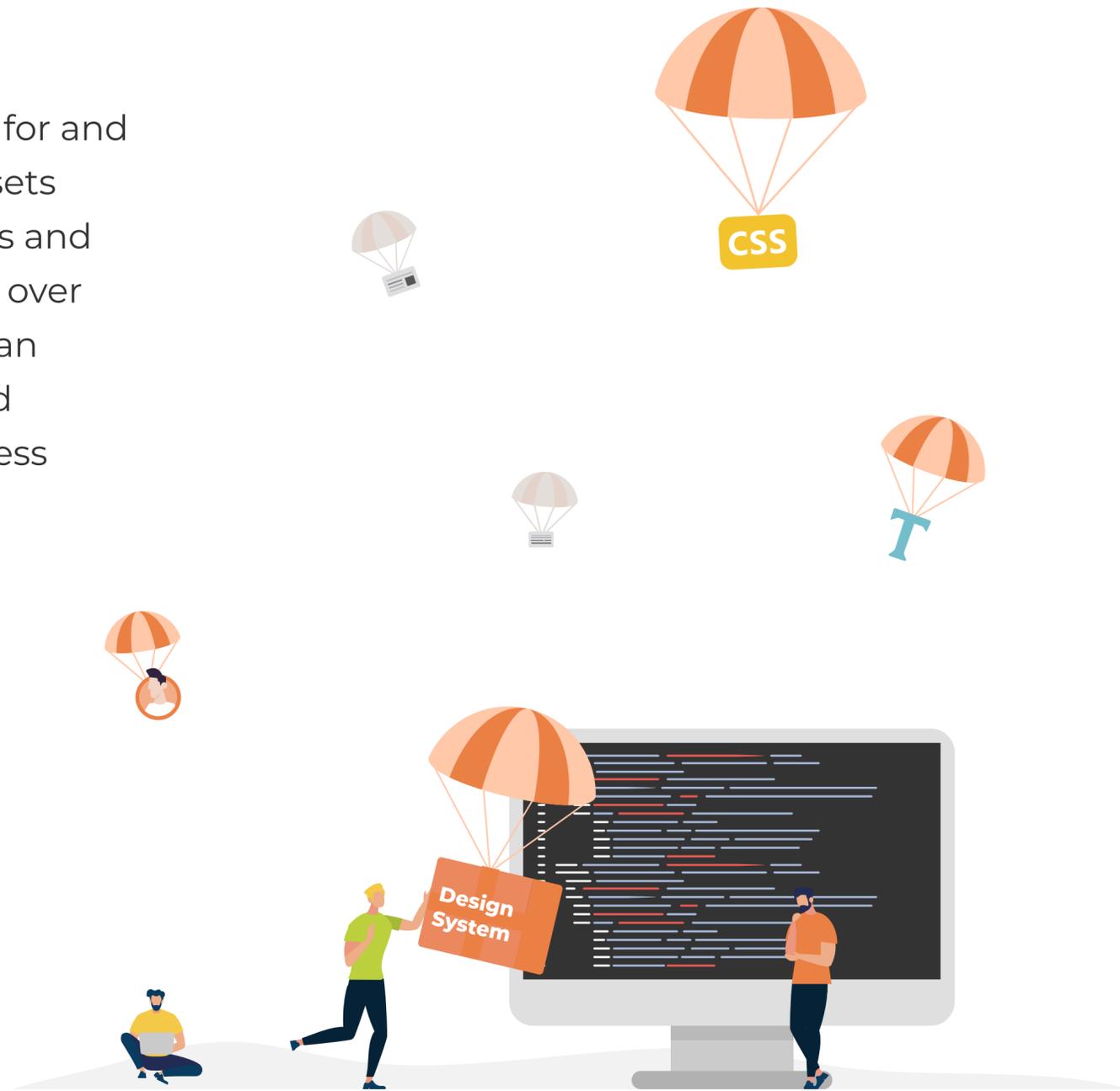


- ◆ As part of the weekly learning session, create an **individual learning path** for each employee that is regularly reviewed and includes hands-on, practical learning.
- ◆ Give teams access to **external learning resources** to support their learning path, such as courses or certifications, to add new skills and qualifications.
- ◆ One of the weekly sessions can be converted into a **Design Thinking workshop that will allow the teams to collaborate** on improving their workflow.
- ◆ Have a post-project session to transfer important knowledge and **key insights gained through working on a project**.

Conclusion

Our framework for Design/Dev hand-off accounts for and **solves the issues of communication**, varying skillsets working in tandem, and poor coordination of assets and materials that often lead to projects being late and over budget. **Through our easy to adopt system**, you can ensure a seamless hand-off between designers and developers, and an effective strategy to help Business Support to push the project forward successfully.

Try thinking outside the box when applying this framework to your organization. For example, educating clients on your process can facilitate a better relationship when creating designs or understanding requirements. In addition, make sure to keep up to speed on new tools such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, or future trends in design, like **Figma**.



Uzair Sukhera
Director of Design
and Innovation

About mobileLIVE

mobileLIVE is a Canadian tech-service provider unifying people, technology, and business to accelerate digital transformation.

We don't see this transformation as a choice anymore; rather an imperative.

One that focuses on perfecting experiences, not just products and processes. One that empowers us to do more, by doing it more intelligently. And one that believes in the creation of tomorrow - today.

Our reputation - reliable; our industry recognition - notable; and our record of never having lost a customer - nonnegotiable.

At mobileLIVE, success isn't a decision. It is a choice. A choice to be better than yesterday!

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