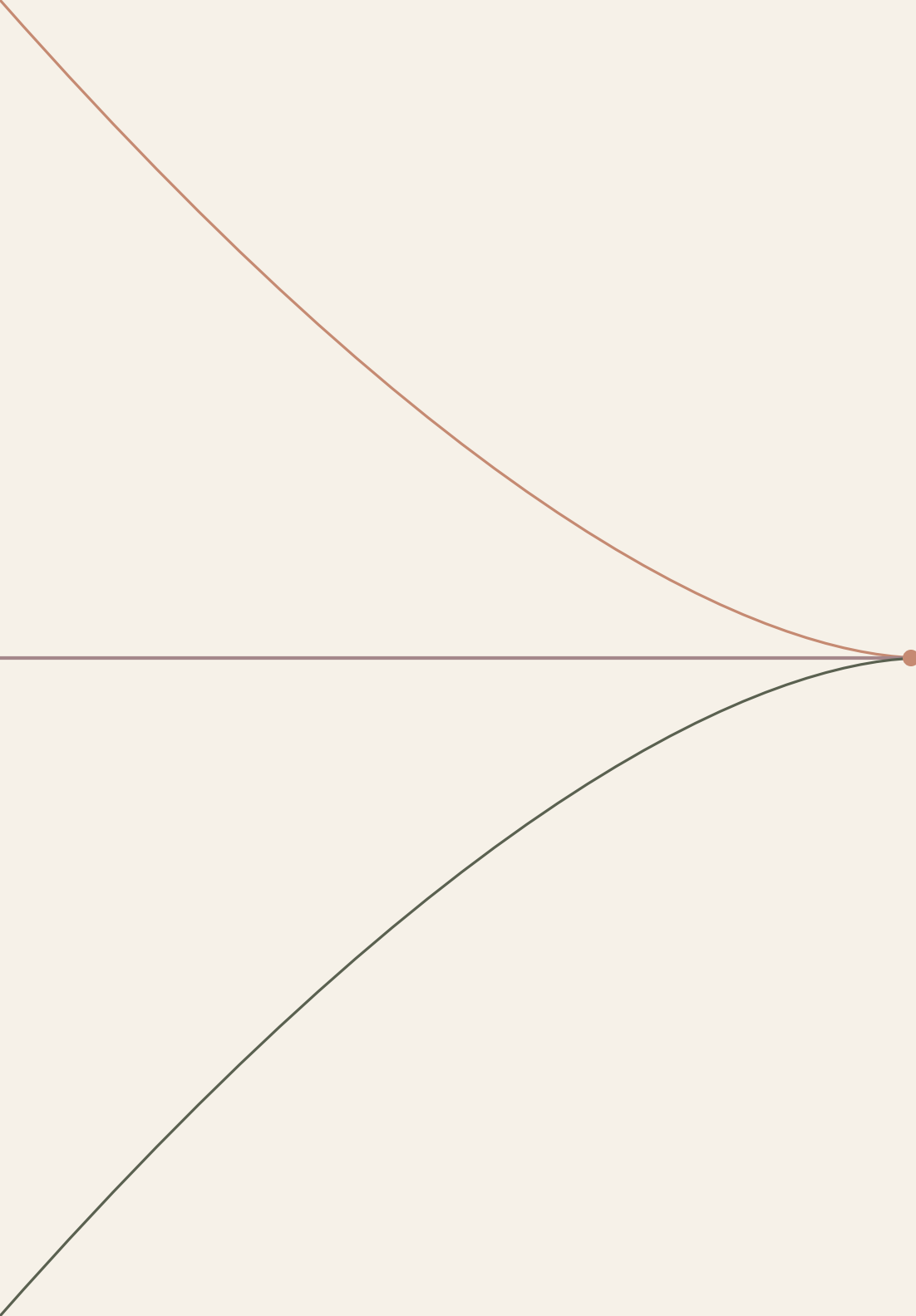


A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide. It features a horizontal line that is part of a larger composition. A red curve starts from the top left and curves down to meet the horizontal line. A green curve starts from the bottom left and curves up to meet the horizontal line. A small red dot marks the intersection point of the two curves on the horizontal line.

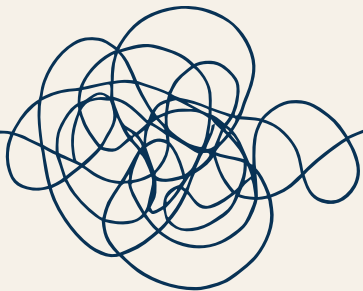
Operations is a Design Problem

How design solves the right problems and unlocks growth

**Complexity
accumulates on its own,
simplicity has to
be designed.**

Organizations waste massive amounts of time and money and call it “progress.” Time and again they solve the wrong problems, designing around symptoms instead of the systems producing them. Strategy, people, and technology end up working at odds: strategy gives direction, dashboards measure something else, and people spend countless hours reconciling gaps. Pressure drives priorities instead of strategy, creating the illusion of progress while teams work around the clock on problems that were preventable: failure that is harder to see because it looks like rigor.

The real work of operations is design. This piece demonstrates what design can do for operations across three phases: discovery clarifies the real problem, build designs a usable solution, and delivery makes it understood. The result is solving the right problems faster, with less waste, while unlocking collaboration, innovation, and higher-quality work.



01 Discover

Seeing before solving



Discovery is how organizations become effective stewards of resources by clarifying what is really needed before deciding what should be done. Listening is where discovery starts, but it is often the first thing to disappear in the rush to progress.

When organizations skip discovery, they misinterpret signals as conclusions: a drop on a dashboard is labeled a performance issue, a stalled initiative a governance issue, low adoption a training issue. Each may hold some truth, but rarely the whole truth. The visible problem becomes the work, while the system producing it remains untouched.

Discovery asks leaders to stay curious even when they are under pressure to decide.

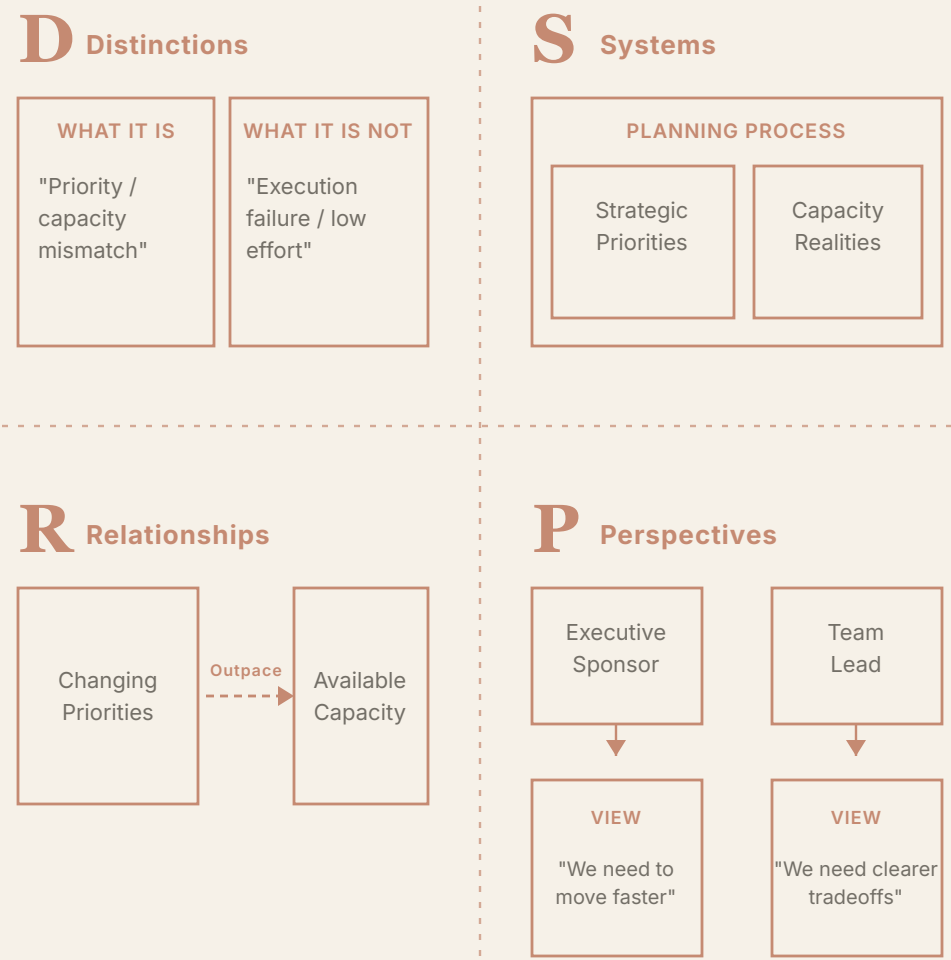
THE FIVE WHYS A simple place to start is the Five Whys, developed within Toyota. A few minutes spent asking “why?” can prevent hours of rework later. When a problem appears, ask why, then ask why again, moving past the visible symptom until the conditions behind it surface. If adoption is low, the first answer may be that teams were not trained. Ask why, and training may have come too late. Ask why again, and the real problem may be that the

tool was designed around leadership reporting needs, not the daily workflow. The problem changes from “people are not using the tool” to “the system was not designed around the work.” You know you have reached the root cause when the answer explains why the system allowed human error to happen, rather than stopping at the person who made it.

SYSTEMS THINKING Once root causes surface, map the problem as a system. Systems thinking is the practice of seeing a problem as interconnected parts, where a change in one place creates a ripple effect elsewhere. I use Systems Thinking’s DSRP framework to form that view by examining distinctions, systems, relationships, and perspectives. Distinctions clarify what the problem is and is not; systems reveal the parts and how they form a whole; relationships show how one part affects another; and perspectives show what different people see from where they stand. For example, a planning process may look like a timeline problem to executives, a capacity problem to teams, and a prioritization problem to the field. Each perspective is real, but none is complete on its own. Discovery brings those views into relationship so the organization can see the system more accurately.

AI requires discovery. Without clear context created through Systems Thinking, AI will amplify complexity rather than

Systems Thinking DSRP



clarify it. From the solid foundation of discovery, AI can identify patterns, distill information, and create an accurate problem statement to build from.

Sustainable progress is layered. Teams can continue to relieve visible pain while understanding the root cause. Discovery does not need months of abstract analysis– it can take a few hours or a few weeks for a complex cross-functional problem. The point is not to stop the work, but to aim it at the right problem.

Ignoring root causes does not save time, only borrows time from the future.

Discovery is the first step of operational design. Understanding the system producing the problem is essential before building. Listen first, ask why until the conditions become visible and map distinctions, systems, relationships, and perspectives, using AI to synthesize, not substitute for understanding. The result is a problem statement clear enough to build against.

o2 Build

Purpose-built systems



Build turns what discovery reveals into something usable. This is where systems thinking and design thinking meet. Systems thinking identified the conditions producing the problem, design thinking **DESIGN THINKING** then turns that understanding into a better operating experience. The question shifts from “What is wrong?” to “How might this work?”

The objective is not simply to create another process or add tooling, but to design the conditions that make the best use of time and resources. When I built and scaled a global Marketing Business Ops function for a 700+ person marketing organization, the company was in significant transformation. More than ninety percent of the leadership team had changed and the operating model had shifted quickly, making work harder than it needed to be. Teams had moved through more than ten restructures while still working around the clock to deliver: we were in new terrain, exhausted, with no map.

My team of Ops managers were embedded across the globe to see firsthand where work was breaking down, listen to leaders and teams, document requirements, and compare patterns across the business. After months of solving symptoms, mapping workflows, and listening to pain points, the operating problem became clear: Marketing primarily operated by function, but pipeline growth depended on work moving across the customer journey. Teams

updated multiple tools manually and reconciled information after the fact with no single source of truth. Leaders had no consistent view of what was planned or driving pipeline, leaving teams to rebuild context weekly. With the problem defined, we used our weekly working sessions to discuss blockers, and brainstorm possibilities, asking: How might we create a connected system that enables work to flow? That question guided the design of what became our Marketing Operating System (MOS).

Disconnection is rarely solved by addition.

MOS was built from the work itself. Marketers planned in spreadsheets, executed in Asana, Salesforce connected campaigns to pipeline, Allocadia held budget and spend, and Tableau showed actuals. Individually they were a headache, together they became the foundation for an integrated operating layer across planning, execution, and measurement. The result: MOS created end-to-end visibility, was adopted by 70+ users across global teams, is projected to save 2,500+ hours annually through bidirectional syncs with core tools, and removed the need for Allocadia in full.

Design Thinking delivers

75%

Less time spent gathering and aligning on requirements, cutting 16-week cycles to four

50%

Less rework needed by resolving issues before they compound

2×

Faster to market than teams working without the practice

Forrester, The Total Economic Impact of IBM's Design Thinking, 2018

The same logic drove MOS: when systems are built around how work actually moves, clarity and speed follow.

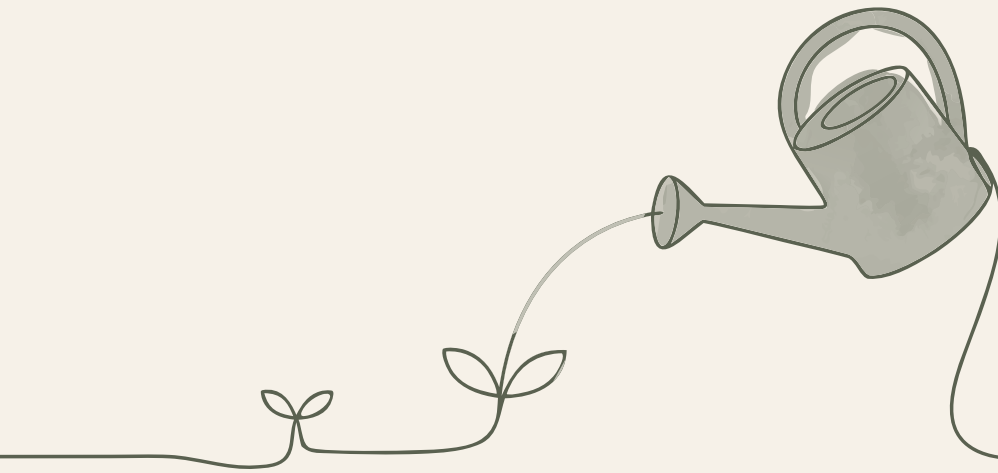
My team couldn't have unlocked so much without AI; build is where AI shines. Given context from users' experience and clear workflow requirements, AI wrote the code for bi-directional syncs with our core tools, supported automated reporting, campaign creation, planning visibility, and on-brand materials for executive meetings. AI was an essential partner in scaling the system that understanding made possible.

Usability and clarity are not byproducts; they are the standard.

Build is where insight becomes infrastructure. Define the problem, then build the system that integrates rhythms, tools, and data around how the work actually flows. When the system is intuitive and mapped to reality, people stop spending creativity on workarounds and start using it to innovate.

03 Deliver

This is a people job



Delivery is where design meets the organization. Once the real problem has been understood and the right solution built, the work becomes translation. Systems become real when people understand, trust, and participate in making them work.

A well-designed system does not automatically create alignment. It does not prevent territorial behavior, fragmentation, quiet disengagement, or the confusion that turns into operational disruption. Organizations are human systems, not purely rational ones. People need to understand why change exists, what problem it solves, and what role they play in making it work. Without that context, even a well-designed system will feel imposed.

People do not resist change, they resist imposed change.

That distinction matters because resistance is often treated as a barrier to push through when it may be information to understand. Resistance reveals where the system is unclear. It shows where trust is thin, where the solution does not match reality, or where people have been asked to absorb too much change without enough support. Good leaders do not dismiss friction, they investigate it with curiosity. This is where leadership becomes

stewardship: accountability to the whole system, not only the outcome. It means staying close enough to the work to see what people are experiencing. The best leaders I know are strong managers, creating clarity, unlocking talent, and helping people do their best work.

ACCESSIBLE DESIGN Accessibility is central to stewardship because it ensures that people can understand, enter, use, and participate. The curb cut effect, a core principle of accessibility, shows that design that removes a barrier for one group often creates ease for many others. Voice commands, dictation, and simplified interfaces are widely used because they reduce friction and expand participation well beyond those with disabilities. Organizations work the same way. Clear workflows, plain language, enablement, and storytelling are not just support materials, but access points into the system. They help people understand the change, see their role in it, and act on it. Good communication is part of the design.

Delivery fails when people are told about a change but not given access. I've seen a new analytics model rolled out by taking dashboards down with little explanation of the delay or the value it would bring. Then when questions arose about the model, confusion was treated as incompetence instead of

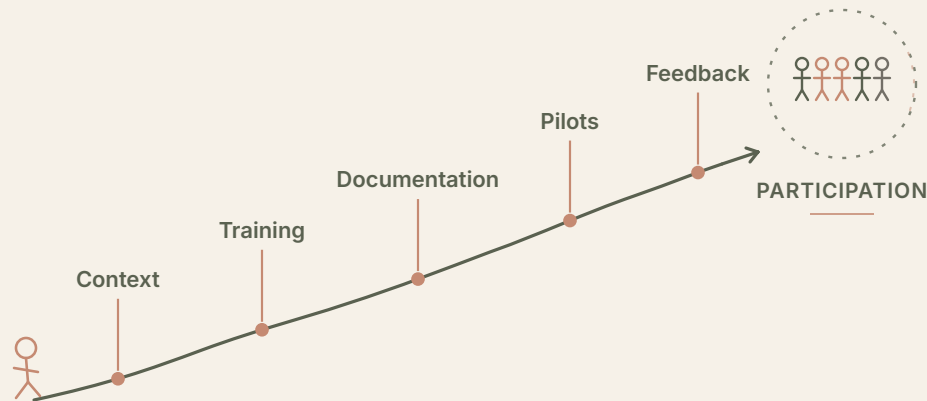
THE BARRIER

Told about the change, but given no way in.



ACCESS POINTS

Accessible design creates access points so people can understand, enter, use, and participate.



THE CURB CUT EFFECT

Remove a barrier for one, and you create easier entry for many. Accessible design is the pathway into the system.



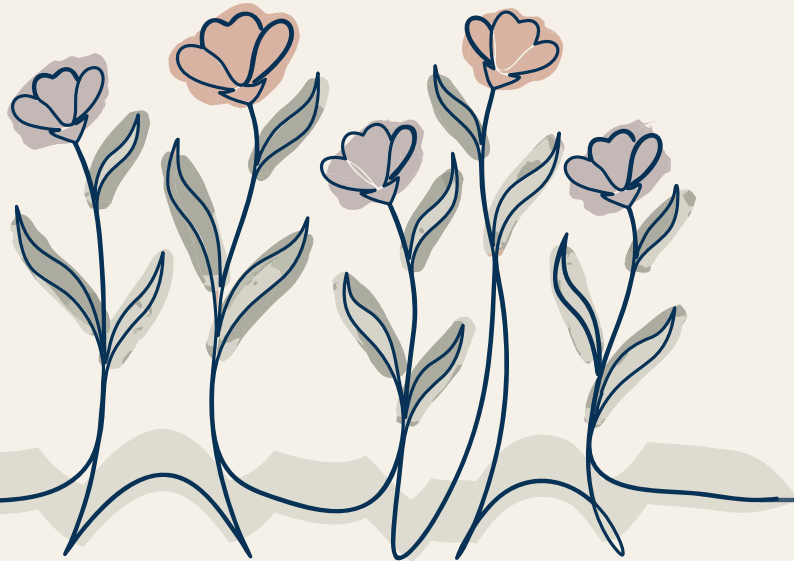
feedback. The problem was not that people were unwilling to change, but that they had not been brought into the change.

Systems are only as effective as the understanding of the people using them.

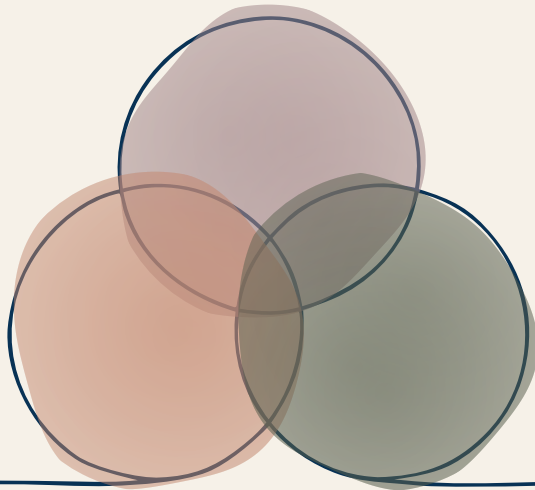
The path forward is rarely a single rollout, but sustained stewardship through listening, learning, and dialogue. The goal is not passive compliance, but active participation. With MOS, that meant building the path before asking people to use the system. Foundational trainings, targeted pilots, office hours, and repeated explanation across time and context created access points into the future state so teams could understand and move forward with confidence.

We are not only architects of systems, but stewards of the human systems inside them. Listen to understand what's actually needed, design the system, then provide access into the system. That is how operational design creates change people can sustain.

Designing the Future of Work



Organizational health equals wealth.



When strategy, people, and technology align by design, organizations spend less time compensating and more time innovating. Design creates a healthy foundation for work that, when paired with AI, unlocks pathways once unthinkable. A thriving organization is more effective because it stewards talent, technology, and capital rather than squandering resources on panicked rework in the rush to progress.

This future is neither abstract nor out of reach. Operational design is accessible: discover before solving, build what is needed, and deliver so people can understand, trust, and participate. That is how rigor and design carry organizations beyond managing complexity toward human systems worthy of the people inside them.

Renae Vespremi



My career spans across creative and operations leadership, bringing analytical rigor and design discipline together to build the connective architecture organizations need to use resources wisely, scale effectively, and stay human in the process. My approach is holistic in diagnosis and precise in design, building the conditions for sustainable growth.

Let's connect.

Bring me in to diagnose operational friction, redesign how teams work, or build the systems behind your AI transformation.

Work together · Talk it through · Invite me to speak/teach → [BOOK 30 MINUTES](#) • renaevespremi.com • linkedin.com/in/renaevespremi