

Untying the Knot of Design & Strategy

Michael Chanover

Hi.

This talk focuses on ways that we, as designers, can untangle the knot of “design” and “strategy”.

In doing so, I will help provide an illuminated understanding of what “strategic design” means.

As a result, you will have a stronger framework for understand strategic design and ability to practice it.

First off... let's revisit design

Everything in the world (other than nature) has been designed.



This mean that designers have
great power.



**“With great power, come great
responsibility”**

Peter Parker

One of our responsibilities as designers is to serve the discipline of design as best as we can by helping advance it.

Section 1: Definition

What is “Strategy”

[strat-i-jee]

noun

A plan, method, or series of maneuvers or stratagems for obtaining a specific goal or result: *a strategy for getting ahead in the world.*

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What is “Strategy”

Examples include...

How to score a phone number at a party:

“First I’m going to introduce myself.

Then, I’m going to ask him / her if they like music.

Then, I’m going to ask if they’d like to see a show together.”

What is “Strategy”

Examples include...

How to use half the number of paper towels in your home:

“Paper towels will be cut in half.

In addition, if a paper towel is used on water, it will be hung to dry and re-used.”

What is “Design”

[dī-zīn']

verb

To create or execute in an artistic or highly skilled manner.

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To create or execute in an artistic or highly skilled manner.

What is “Design”

Examples include...

A product:



What is “Design”

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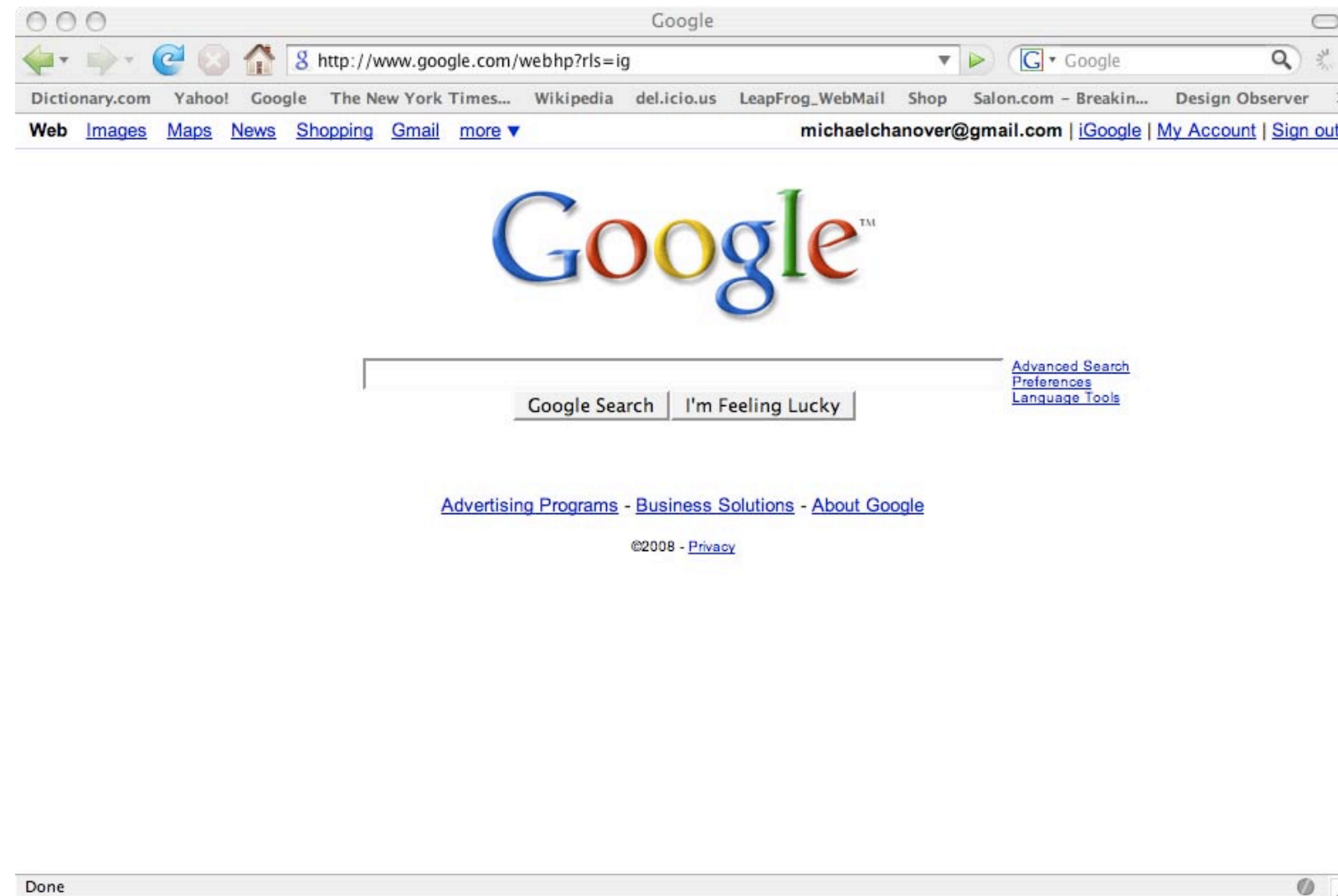
A graphic design:



What is “Design”

Examples include...

A interactive design:

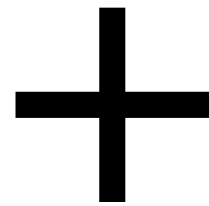


What then is “Design Strategy”

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noun

A plan, method, or series of maneuvers or stratagems for obtaining



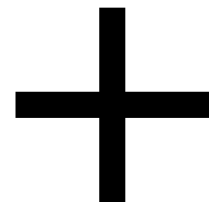
a creative goal or result in an artistic or highly skilled manner.

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noun

A **plan**, method, or series of maneuvers or stratagems **for obtaining**



a creative goal or result **in an** artistic or **highly skilled manner**.

“Uh... don't I already do this?”

YES,

you do.

Design is inherently strategic.

As designers, we therefore need to develop frameworks for creating strategies, and a vocabulary for talking about our strategies.

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WHY?

Because designers are increasingly being asked to solve problems, real problems, that take careful thought, planning, development, and execution.

“Design” is becoming more “strategic”.

Here are 8 examples how:

Example #1

Designers are evolving from SSCs (“single solution creators”) to PCs (“part creators”). This takes more planning and careful thought. iGoogle is an example of this. threadless.com is another example.



Example #2

The media loves “strategic design”. The ABC / FrontLine segment in 1998 on IDEO’s shopping cart project signaled an ongoing love affair with the notion that carefully planned design makes good business.



Example #3

Businesses require it; more and more companies are requiring designers to have writing, speaking and problem solving skills, in addition to traditional visual design skills.

“The Web Creative Director is responsible for leading the information architecture, visual design, user experience, and strategic design of all LeapFrog Web products.”

Example #4

Academia continues to support the pursuit of strategic problem solving and design. Programs like CMU, IIT, RISD, MIT, CCA and others are successfully evolving the role of design.



Example #5

As the global economy continues to shift, the “*specialist*” will be pushed further away from the “*generalist*”.

In doing so, the *generalist* will need to develop stronger strategic design skills in order to support larger pieces of the pie.

Example #6

The increasingly pervasive qualities of technology require even more coordination than ever before.



Example #7

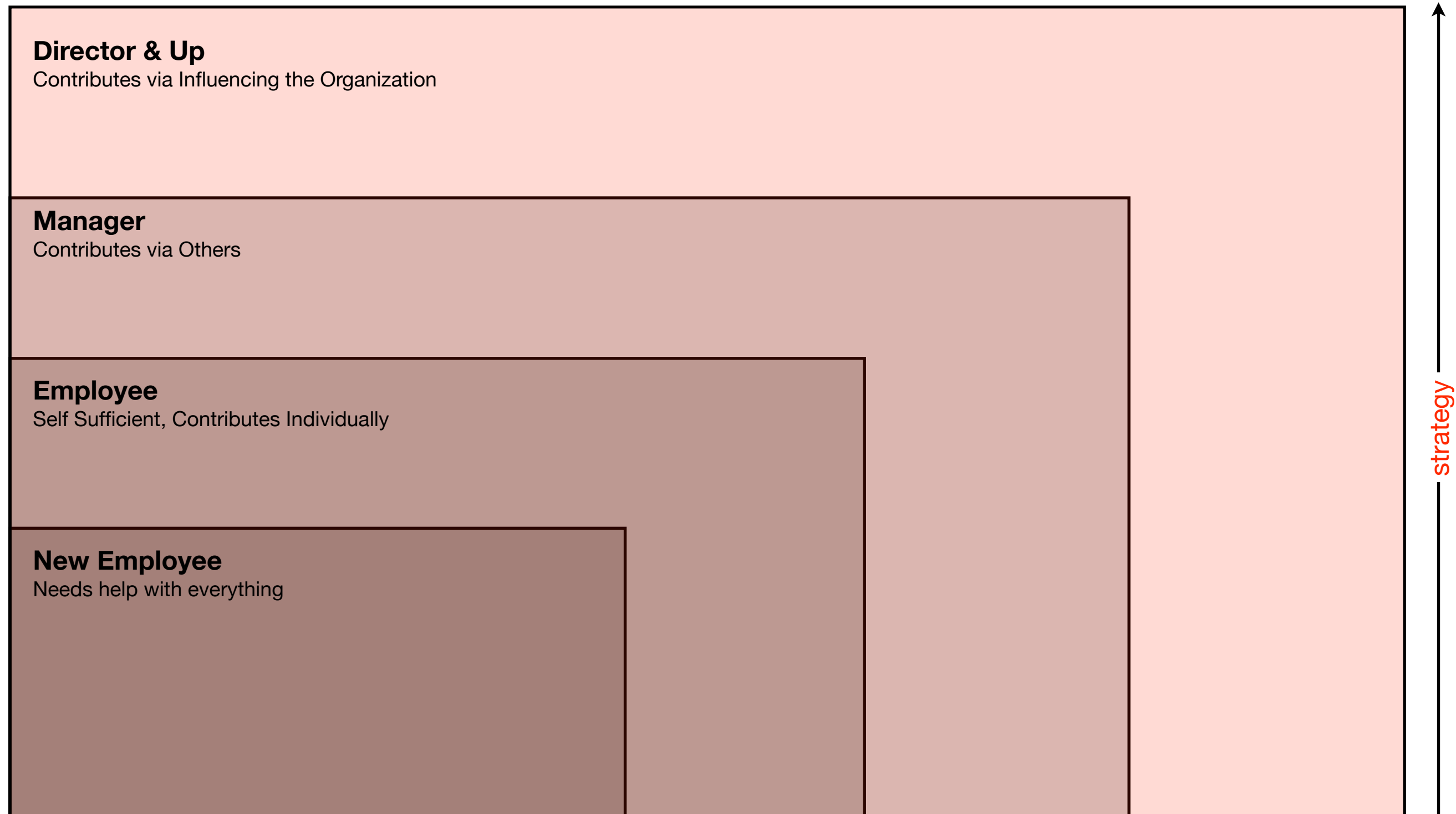
Most products have already been designed, at least once. Design is therefore increasingly the “differentiator”.



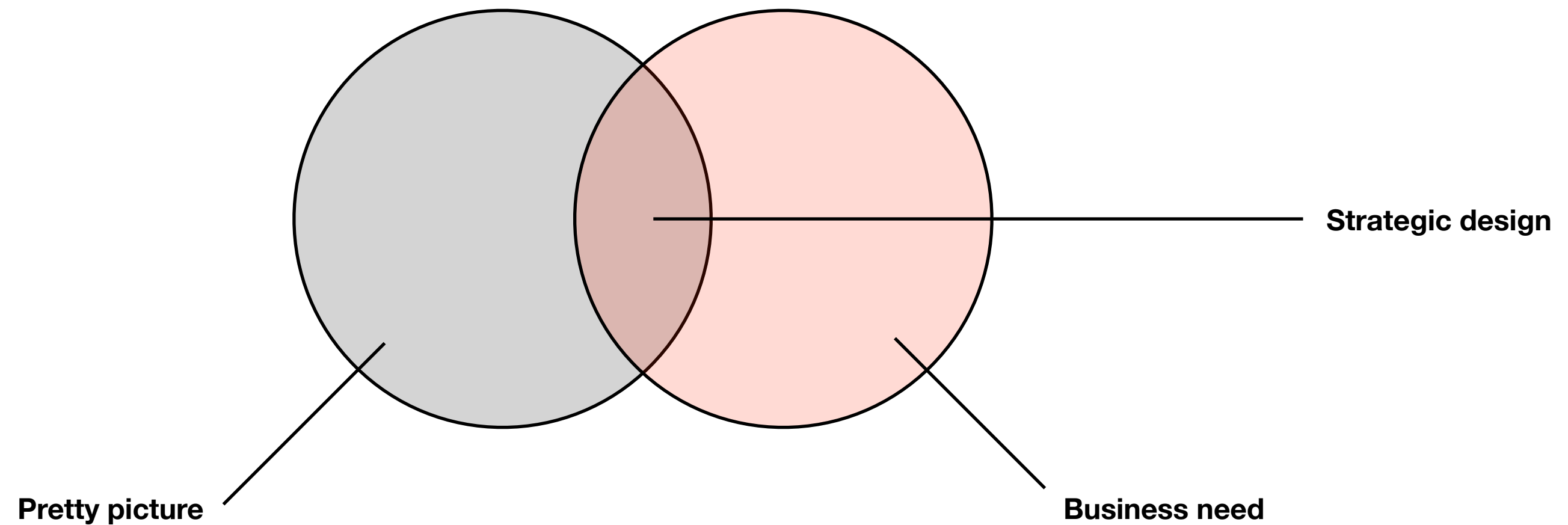
Example #8

We're already doing it. Does anyone here NOT make a plan for obtaining a creative goal as part of their process?

An increase in role = an increase in strategy



Strategy serves as the bridge between “style” and “business solutions”.



By the way, this is not a new concept. Others, while not naming it, have practiced “strategic design” for the last 40+ years.

Here are some other contributors:



This is Jay Doblin

He's one of the grandfathers of "strategic design".

Jay Doblin (1920–1989) believed in the power of design to solve large-scale and complex problems. He was an innovator in industrial, product and graphic design, design methods, design theory, and management. Through his teaching, practice, and role as spokesperson, he continually pushed the profession to extend itself beyond surface roles.



This is Donald Norman

He's another one of the grandfathers of "strategic design".

"We will never make progress as long as we are resources and not leaders. Resources don't discuss the business plan, or the marketing strategy. Resources don't help decide what the product or service will be in the first place. Resources are called in when the leaders think they are needed. They do their job and then get out of the way."



This is Clement Mok

He's another one of the grandfathers of "strategic design".

"I think when talking with clients, we have to focus on something that is jointly owned...and that has more to do with the process of designing...the process of taking ideas and making them real...the process of solving a complex problem.

As we all know the process of designing involves many... the process of designing is what gets problems solved, and it is what generates value...."



Walt Disney

He's another one of the grandfathers of "strategic design".

"Advertisers in general are demanding a more and more relevant experience. The more we know about a user, where they are located, what their interests are, the more we can match the right ad to the right time.."

Section 2: Application

How to create a vocabulary for strategic design:

Ask and answer the following questions with each project you create.

Question #1

What am I creating and why?

In answering this, you are developing a way to talk about your work, and your motives.

Question #2

What plans have a put in place to ensure that I am creating what I set out to create?

- Speaking with prospective users
- Creating schedules
- Looking at competitors
- Assessing existing technologies
- Organizing brainstorming
- Researching writings and lectures
- Interviewing industry experts

Question #3

When I list my plans out, how many different ways can I talk about them?

By talking about your plans, you are practicing the art of rhetoric, and subsequently developing a voice for your strategies.

How to create a framework for strategic design:

Consider the following frameworks with each project you create.

A framework for completing a project:

Research

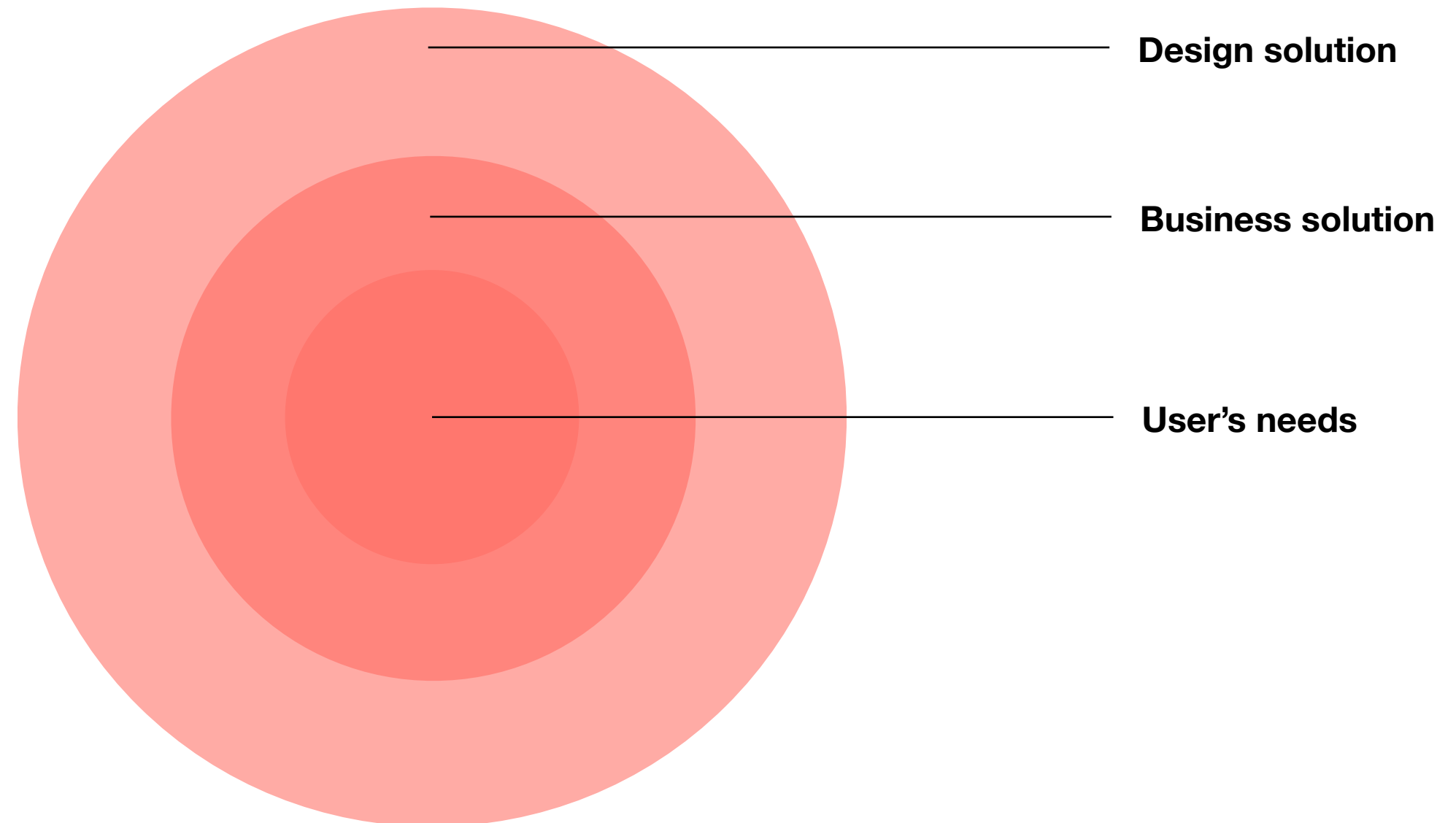
Prototype

Design

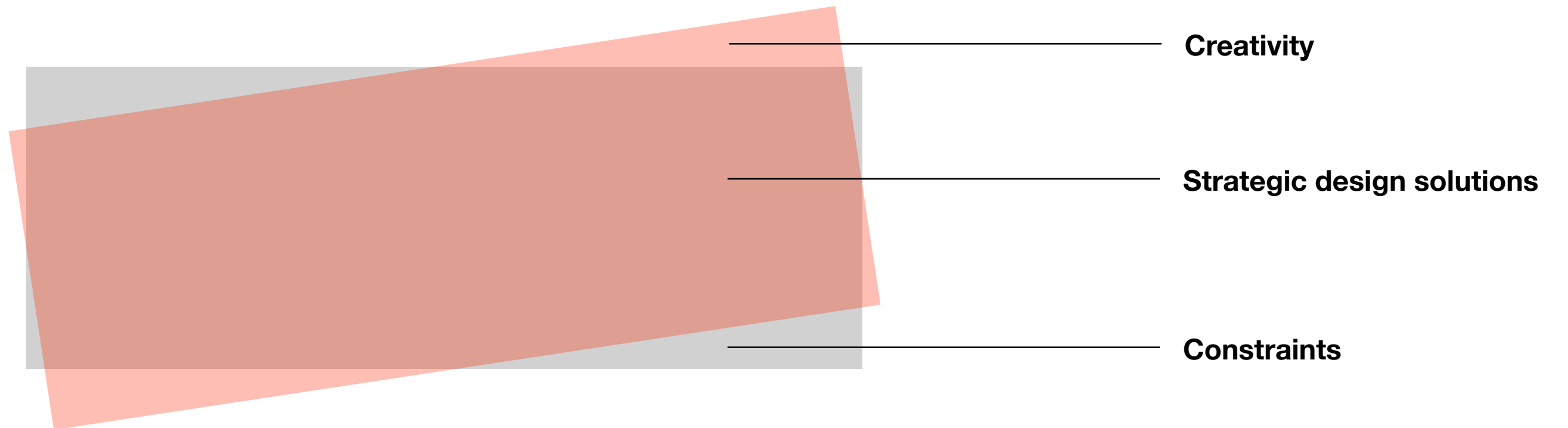
Build



A framework for user centered design:



A framework for applying design within an organization:



Section 3: Implementation

Why is this hard for designers?

As simple as this seems, designers constantly struggle with the notion of applying a strategic process to one's work. Here are some reasons why:

Why is this hard: Reason #1

“Strategy is too hard; I’ll leave that to the MBAs in the company.”

Does this sound like a statement that elevates the stature of design?

Why is this hard: Reason #2

“How can I create a framework or vocabulary, if I don’t know, where I’m heading with a project?”

Whether conscious or unconscious, you are heading down a path.
Applying strategy helps guide the process.

Why is this hard: Reason #3

“I just want to be creative. This seems like too much work.”

Consider the difference between art and design.

Why is this hard: Reason #4

“I know how to gather research, I just don’t know what to do with it.”

You’re more than half way there. Now, just look for ways to frame your research, starting with **what is interesting to you.**

Why is this hard: Reason #5

“This all takes time, and I don’t have a lot of it. Can’t I just skip this?”

When embarking on a trip, would you skip the step of getting directions to your destination?

Why is this hard: Reason #6

I'm not being involved in the process by others.

“Try not.... do.” -Yoda

Insert yourselves in the process and use your vocabulary and frameworks to demonstrate that you are involved in the process.

Now what?

Now, you can start applying this.
As the future design leaders of
the world, your strategies will
becomes as important as your
designs.

Use this to your advantage, and
and join the ranks of other design
leaders who help use design **to
make the world a better place.**

After all, we are designers.



Thanks.

You can download a copy of this lecture
by going to michaelchanover.com/papers