


How to level up

We recommend involving your entire design team in the process and using this as an opportunity to conduct a workshop and an ongoing dialogue within your team.

01 Fill out the Self-Assessment with your team.


Assign a facilitator to guide the exercise. Each member of the design team completes the Self-Assessment. The facilitator collects and compiles the results.

02 Identify the team's target stage with the key below:

-  • 1-2 designers
- They are generalists who are also able to go deep in their areas of expertise
- Hire contractors to fill in the gaps

-  • 2-5 designers
- An experienced designer is leading the team
- Designers are still mostly generalists
- Start hiring specialists to support the company's goals

-  • Have a Head or Director of Design
- Design managers and leads are building out their teams
- Hire specialists
- Hire and develop junior designers

-  • Have a VP of Design
- Have leaders for different design divisions
- Layers of management (manager of managers)
- Creative teams are built around critical business areas

03 Discuss the results.

The facilitator shares how the team is performing in each area of core development, and guides conversation.

It's important to acknowledge the areas where the team is performing well—where the checked box is at or to the right of the team's target stage. Assign owners within the team who will be responsible for maintaining that level of performance.

Next, focus on the areas for improvement—where the checked box is to the left of the target level. Have an open dialogue around these areas and their contributing factors.

04 Take action.

Identify one core area of development that your design team is committing to improve over the next quarter. Nominate a member of the design team who will act as an owner.

This owner will lead discussion to identify concrete next steps to implement change, set goals and milestones, and check in with the team throughout the quarter.

Follow the same steps at the start of the next quarter to track your progress and identify the next area of development to invest in as a team.

05 Rinse and repeat.

Follow the same steps at the start of the next quarter to track your progress and identify the next area of development to invest in as a team.



<p>Process & Documentation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No agreed-upon design process No standardized workflow Check-ins, critiques, and reviews are ad hoc, or they don't happen at all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have started documenting design decisions Have a working style guide Have a clear way to share files with fellow designers and hand off assets to engineers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have style guides for different areas of design maintained by product, engineering, and marketing Have a process to onboard new designers and equip them with tools they need to work effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a clearly defined process that designers use as a guiding framework, with clear owners of the visual language, interaction standards, and more Have defined principles and values to work by Team actively seeks feedback on their deliverables and design process
<p>Communication & Collaboration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methods of communication are fluid and serve immediate needs Most conversations happen in person and in collaborative working sessions with cross-functional teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to face-to-face conversations, there are different modes of communication for different purposes, spanning verbal and written/asynchronous methods Team is still learning how to communicate effectively and doesn't yet have agreed-upon standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have agreed-upon rules for communicating effectively Designers know how to give clear feedback and how to receive it In the broader company, non-designers regularly and openly seek input on their work from designers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have completed facilitation and difficult conversation training Have well-defined rules for critique, and designers know how to request the type of feedback they want Effectively communicate with external partners about how to best work with design
<p>Critique & Feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No formal critique process Designers help facilitate feedback on design work from other teams at the company Due to the small design team, designers seek feedback on their work from designers in the outside community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host design critiques at a set time each week to share progress and get feedback from designers Impromptu conversations happen in between weekly critiques to keep momentum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host critiques at key points of the design process and invite non-design stakeholders to participate, with a schedule of presenters and clear rules on how to engage Use critiques to educate non-designers on how to give productive feedback Introduce more scalable methods of collecting feedback over tools like Slack, Wake, Abstract, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design managers schedule and facilitate critiques for their respective teams Design team proactively assesses all work produced companywide and has a process in place for improving it Works in progress are visible to the broader company by way of pin-ups, internal tools, and design team announcements
<p>Development & Coaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designers have some opportunities to learn from colleagues, but need to look outside the company for substantial design expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to learning from colleagues, design team has a budget for professional development to put toward internal workshops, coaching, and external conferences and classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industry experts come in to develop team Designers participate in professional development or leadership programs Designers are encouraged to set up plans for skill development with their managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to professional development opportunities for the entire design team, your Head of Design has a dedicated leadership coach The company offers similar services to up-and-coming design leaders
<p>Recruiting & Leveling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No in-house recruiter Designers are responsible for preparing job descriptions, defining the interview process, and sourcing design candidates from their own networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-house recruiter helps with sourcing and scheduling, but design team drives interview process and defines assessment criteria Designers source referrals from their activity and connections in the design community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have an in-house recruiter focused on building your design team Have a clear hiring plan and corresponding job descriptions Have content about your design team's culture and process to share with candidates and attract inbound applicants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design roles, levels, and compensation are clearly defined Have a dedicated design recruiter and a refined recruiting process Team undergoes interview training and unconscious bias training Have a website to showcase the design team and ethos
<p>Space & Seating</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entire company still fits in one room Designers sit next to the engineer who is building what they're designing Likely in a co-working or temporary office space Haven't invested in the environment in a meaningful way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design team sits together Plenty of opportunities to collaborate with one another and with cross-functional teammates Have areas to pin up work in progress and host collaborative work sessions Have a design library with resources and inspiration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designers have a "home base" for heads-down work Team has a common area for dedicated design sprints Have access to a resource library and tools for printing, prototyping, and other forms of creative expression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to the above spaces for designers, Design influences the office space for the entire company, which influences decisions about the floorplan, furnishing, and the proximity of different departments and how they interact Design permeates the company culture

Reference the full Framework.

For each row, decide which set of bullet points best describes your company's design team.

Check off the corresponding box on this Self-Assessment and include any relevant notes.



<p>Process & Documentation</p>				
<p>Communication & Collaboration</p>				
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