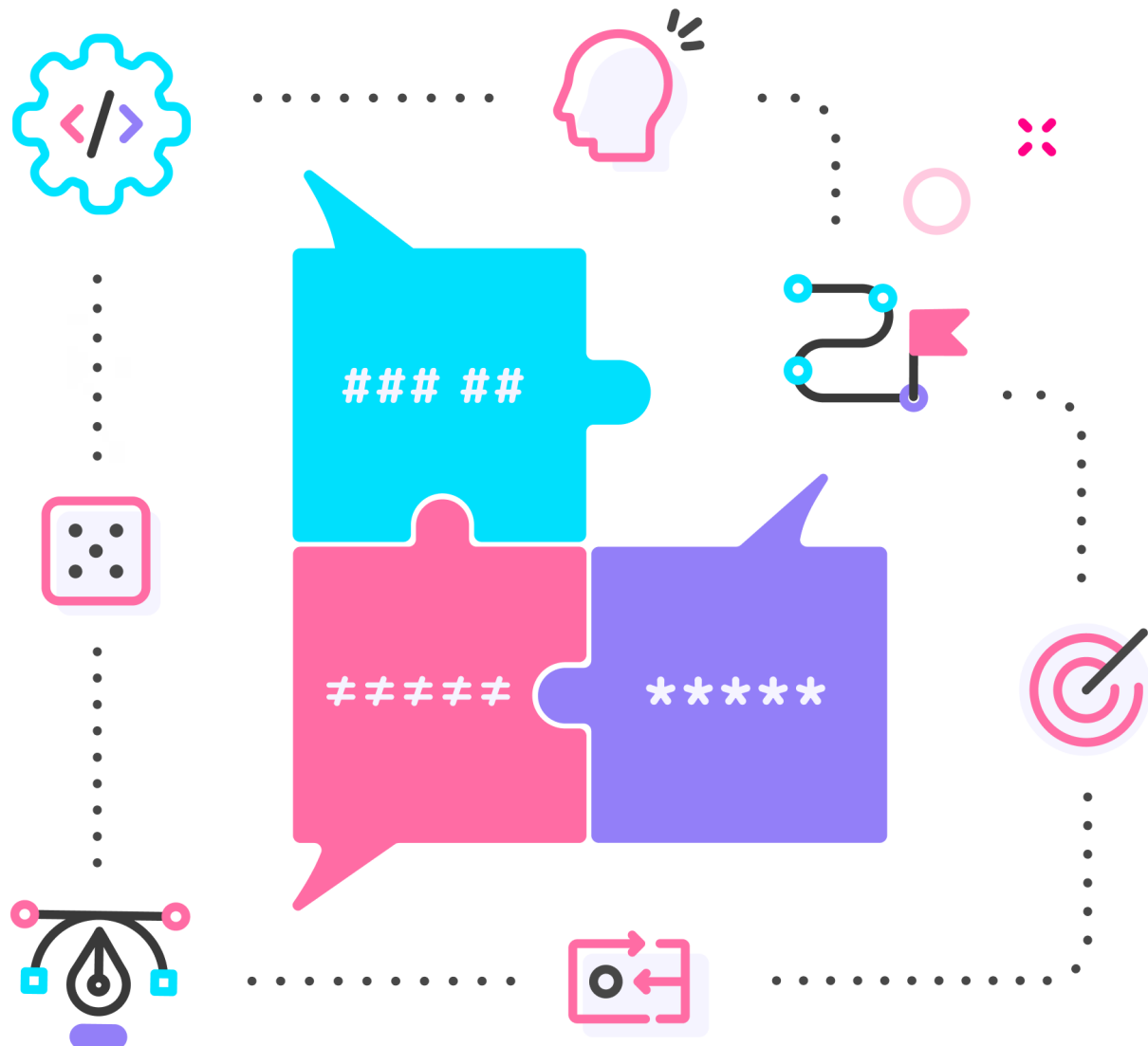


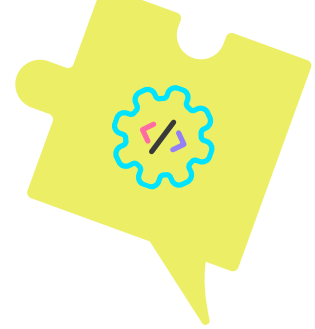
The 4 Ps of Highly Effective Product, Design and Engineering Teams





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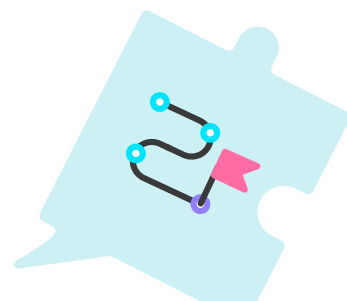


Introduction

Sometimes it feels like Product, Design, and Engineering teams aren't speaking the same language

In a perfect world, your organization's Product, Design, and Engineering teams would work together as one cohesive unit. But reality is messier, and cross-functional collaboration can be a challenge.

If it feels like your Product, Design, and Engineering departments have to go to great lengths to collaborate — almost as if they're speaking different languages — you are not alone. And for a lot of teams, this challenge has been exacerbated by remote and hybrid work.





The importance of team engagement

Before we explore the factors that make Product, Design, and Engineering (PDE) teams successful, we need to define what that means. In other words, what do effective PDE teams do well? Ultimately, it boils down to engagement. Teams that are engaged with each other, with the organization's mission, and with their work are more likely to succeed. They collaborate seamlessly, solve problems together, and enjoy the work they do every day.

But how do you measure engagement? [Gallup](#) polls workers on a variety of factors that make up employee engagement, including productivity, retention, safety, and overall wellbeing. [Microsoft](#) takes it a step further and measures employee thriving, which they define as “to be energized and empowered to do meaningful work.”

That's why PDE leaders are now, more than ever, invested in fostering **connection, engagement,** and **understanding** among their teams.





The 4 Ps of highly effective PDE teams

Now that we've established the importance of team engagement, let's take a look at the ingredients that go into it — the four Ps of effective PDE teams. **The most successful Product, Design, and Engineering teams excel in all four of these areas:**



People

They build connection and trust among PDE teams.



Purpose

They galvanize employees to realize a shared product vision.



Process

They keep everyone aligned around both day-to-day processes and the big picture.



Play

They encourage imagination, creativity, and playfulness at work.

In this guide, we'll dig into how these factors impact team engagement and performance. We will also provide strategies and templates to help PDE team leaders decrypt common misunderstandings, miscommunications, and challenges across these four categories. It's time for PDE orgs to finally speak the same language.



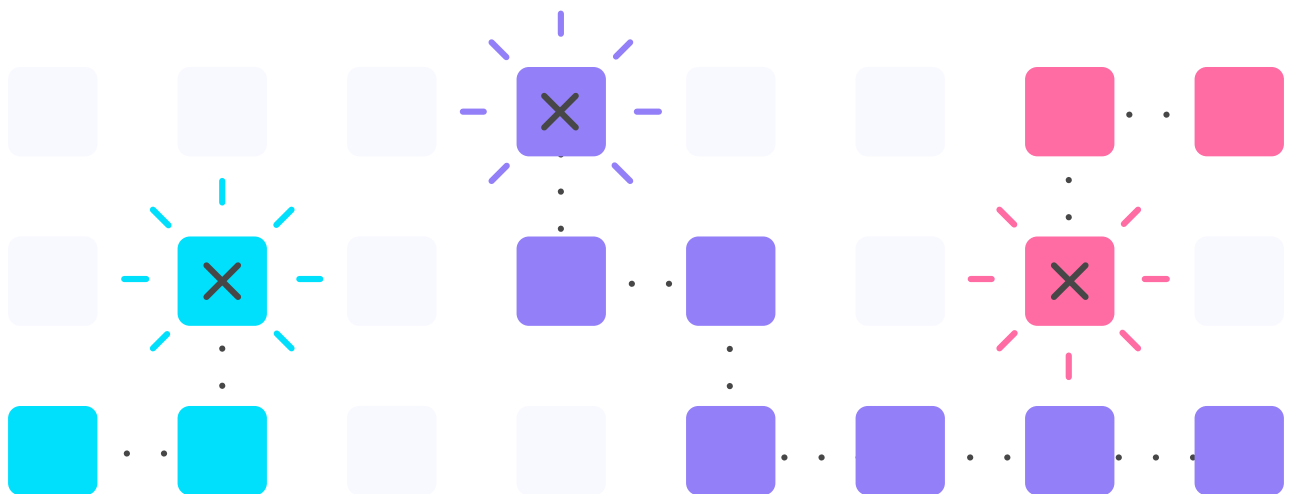
Chapter One

People

Build connection and trust among PDE teams

A 2021 [Glint report](#) found that **disconnection** was the single largest contributor to employee burnout, followed by workload and work-life balance. Disconnection is a global problem, and it's a bigger issue than you may expect. In 2020, 56% of people felt disconnected from their colleagues because of remote work.

Picture this scenario: Your team gets dropped on a sports field with a variety of balls and equipment, and you're told to play a match. The whistle blows, and you're expected to get to it with no discussion — without even agreeing on which sport you're playing. It's not going to be very productive, is it?





The same is true for collaboration. Even if you have a clear goal in mind, people need ground rules in order to reach that goal. Otherwise, they end up bumbling around the metaphorical field and failing to work together. Some people eventually end up drifting toward the sidelines, while others take over the field and play by their own rules. This can be confusing and discouraging, not to mention a barrier to equity and inclusion.

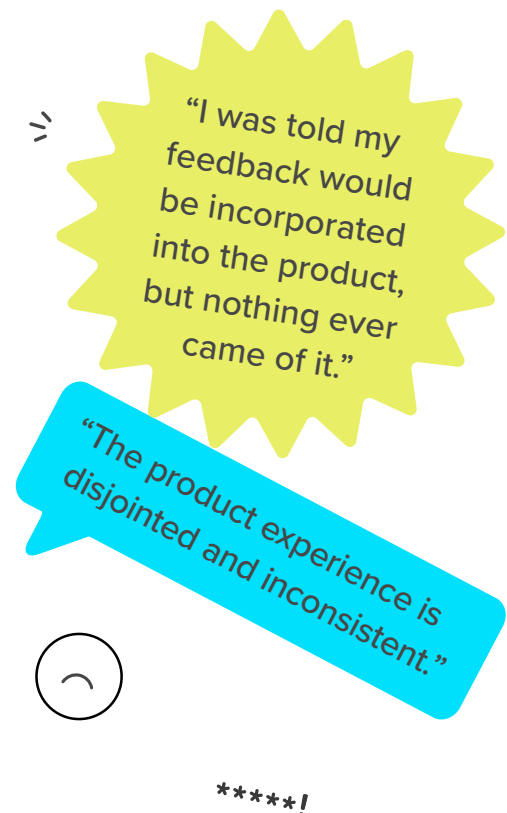
To take everyone's needs into account and create space for engagement, you need to foster a culture of trust and connection.

Culture and connection might be a challenge for your teams if you hear any of the following.

From team members



From customers





Solutions

Product organizations often act as the connection point for many teams across the company. This means working with many different types of people from different places. It's important to establish a sense of trust both within PDE teams, and between the product organization and the rest of the company.

In part, this means defining norms, rules, and expectations for how your team collaborates in meetings and beyond. Here are three ways to build trust and create connection on your Product, Design, and Engineering teams.

1. Establish a team charter with norms and ground rules for meetings.

At first brush, establishing ground rules for meetings might seem like an unnecessary barrier to engagement, but it's actually the opposite. One way to set ground rules that take everyone's needs into account is by creating a team charter. Team charters establish norms, rules, and expectations for how your team collaborates in meetings and beyond.

2. Create team member user manuals to support onboarding.

Onboarding is a critical time for both new team members and for the existing members of your team. This is an opportunity to set expectations and ensure people feel included right from the beginning.

It's a given that you should provide team members with an onboarding guide that outlines your team charter. Your team charter serves as a guide to your team values, norms, and working agreements. But what about a guide to working with individual team members? This is an area of opportunity that most PDE teams miss.

The solution is to have your team members create their own person "user manuals" that let people know what matters to them.

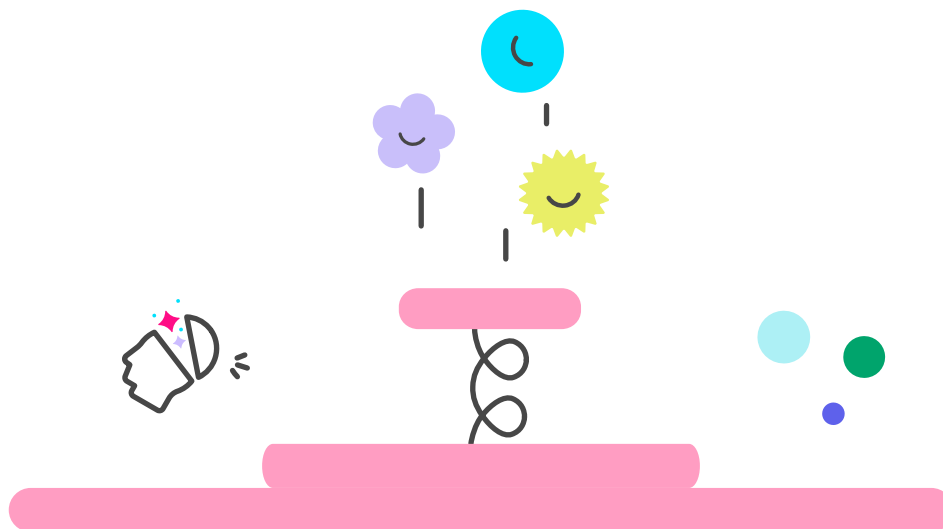


When new folks are joining the team, you can emphasize how excited you are that they're going to be helping add to your team's culture. You hired them for a reason, and it's not just about their skills, but also about who they are as individuals. That's where the user manuals come in. They should outline an individual's working style, online hours, and other key information about them. Onboarding employees will also have access to their colleague's user manuals, so they can provide the best support possible to one another.

3. Use warmups, icebreakers, and energizers to boost engagement in team meetings.

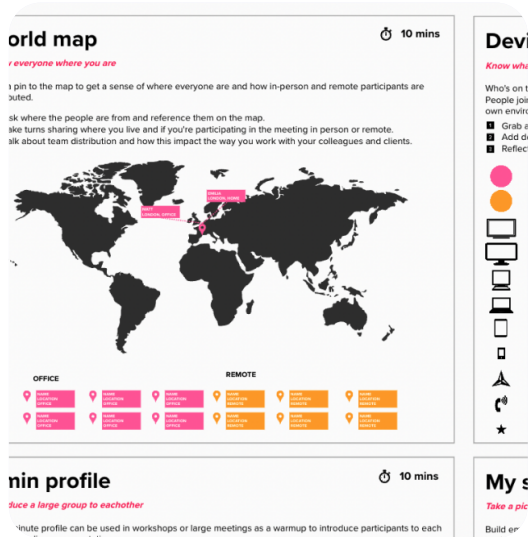
When you make space for your employees to build healthy relationships with each other, they're less likely to feel isolated. One way to do this is by hosting regular warmups, icebreakers, and energizers in your team meetings.

It's no secret that some people roll their eyes at icebreakers, but when done right, they're a great way to build rapport and start meetings off on the right foot. The key is to make them low-pressure and fun. Instead of asking everyone to share a "fun fact" (yawn), host a more structured activity that asks folks to share how they're feeling that day or answer a specific question about themselves. Don't expect your team members to get too personal in a large group, and don't drag your warmups out too long — they should be engaging and low-stakes, not dull or stressful.





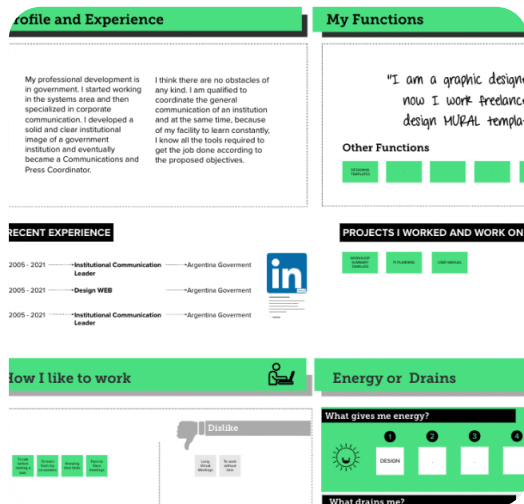
Templates



Icebreakers template

Get inspired by a selection of icebreakers specially designed for meetings and workshops that have a mix of in-person and remote teammates to foster behaviors and attitudes that encourage collaboration and equal participation in hybrid teams.

[Get the template](#)



Employee user manual template

Communication is an integral part of building a connected team. Use this template to establish ground rules for how your team works together.

[Get the template](#)



Chapter Two

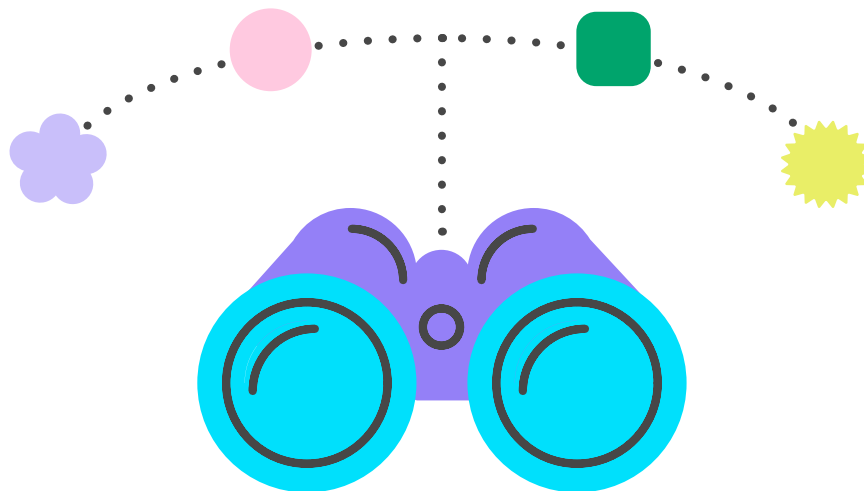
Purpose



Align everyone around a shared product vision

In an [article for TNW](#), tech writer Ritika Puri points out that many organizations “essentially put blinders on their contributors in an effort to keep them focused on the discrete task, rather than an essential contributor to the overall product.” Sound familiar?

Even if your team is collaborative and connected, they can fall short if they aren’t working toward a shared product vision. The truth is, 2+ years of working through a pandemic, adapting to remote and hybrid work, and dealing with a volatile economy is taking a toll on even the brightest, most hardworking employees. People want to be invested in their work, but they need the right support from leadership — and part of that is having a clear vision of what they’re working to achieve.

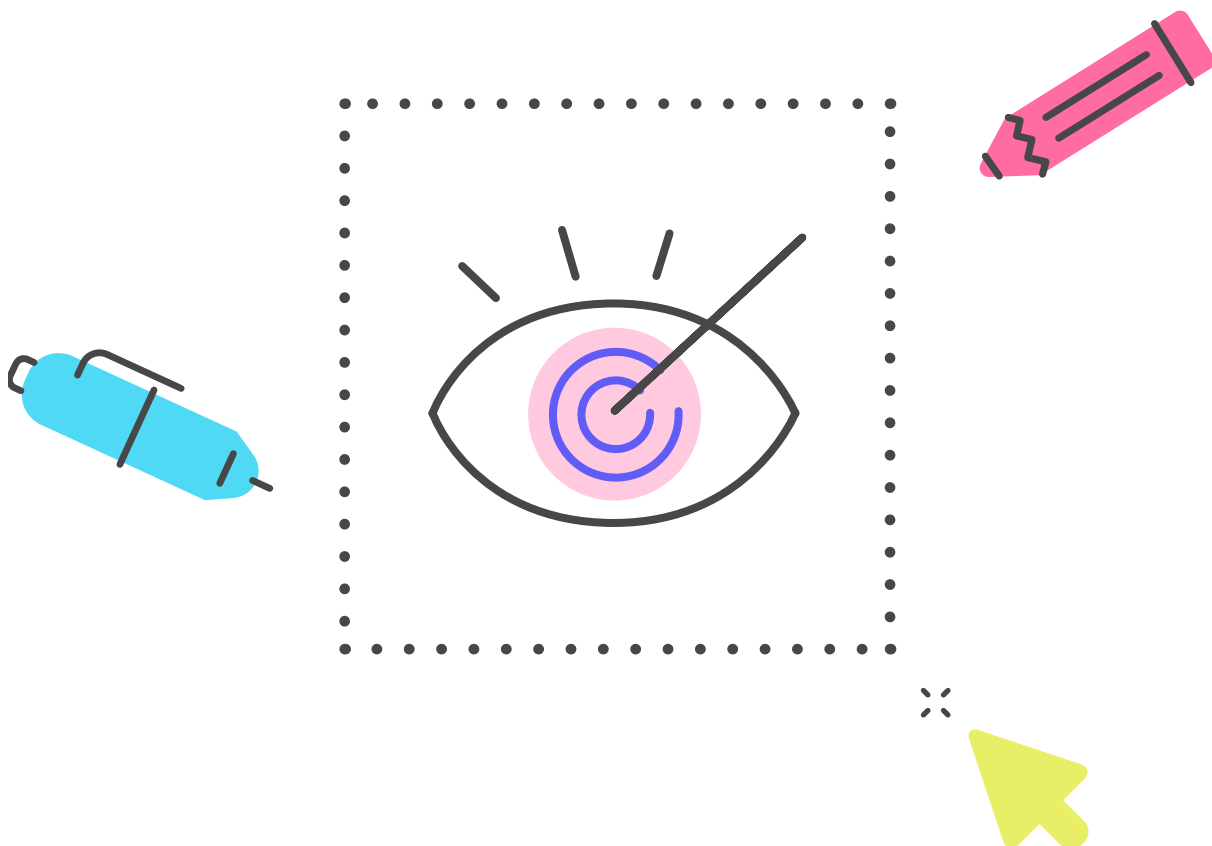




Product vision statements define why a product exists, what problems it solves, who it serves, and how it's different. Product visions serve as a framework for product teams to understand what they are working on and why it matters.

And while product owners ultimately own the product vision, the best visions are created in collaboration with product stakeholders and pressure tested by the leadership team. That's where some teams miss the mark — the vision is passed down from the product owner, and not everyone feels a sense of ownership over the future of the product.

Your product vision is your North Star, guiding your team as they ideate, prioritize, design, develop, test, and iterate. It's the overarching, future-facing mission that everyone — the product owner, product managers, designers, engineers, and beyond — is on together. It brings purpose and passion to the work your team members are doing every day.





Purpose and passion might be a challenge for your teams if you hear any of the following.

From team members



From customers





Solutions

A great product starts with a great story — one that aligns your team and gets employees (and customers!) excited about the product you're building. That story manifests as a product vision.

When was the last time you reviewed your product vision with your team? And how invested are they in achieving it? It might be time for a refresh — so let's look at how your team can collaborate to create an effective product vision, and embed that vision into a product roadmap that paints a clear path to success.

What makes a great product vision?

First, let's review what makes a great product vision that aligns teams across Product, Design, and Engineering.

- **Purposeful:** It aligns closely with the company vision and/or mission statement, as well as with the visions for other products in the same portfolio.
- **Aspirational:** It orients your team to the future and paints a picture of what your product aims to achieve.
- **Achievable:** It's grounded in reality and feasible to achieve.
- **Customer-focused:** It's developed with your target customers and users top of mind.
- **Concise:** It's clear and gets the message across without any extra fluff.

Now that we've established what a great product vision includes, let's look at three steps you can take to revisit, refresh, and create ownership around your product vision.



1. Establish a team charter with norms and ground rules for meetings

Creating your product story starts with understanding the purpose of your product. This ultimately boils down to three questions.

Why does your product exist?

How will you achieve your why?

What is your product?

It sounds easy enough, but this is really an exercise in specificity. You could probably list out dozens of reasons why your product exists, and you could describe it in myriad different ways. But for the purpose of this exercise, make sure you collaborate with product stakeholders to boil it down to its core, to what really matters.

We recommend spending about 15 minutes workshopping your product purpose with your team. It can be tempting to spend days poring over various iterations, but try to timebox yourselves in order to work quickly and efficiently.

2. Create an empathy map

Next, complete an empathy map to develop a deep, shared understanding of your users. If it's been a while since you've done this, do it again! Before you can write a successful product vision, everyone should have an intimate knowledge of your users' needs, their pain points, and their motivations.

First things first, you need to have a clear view of your target persona. Who are you creating this product for? From there, your team can spend 30 minutes completing an empathy map that organizes and refines your collective knowledge about your persona. This empathy map template can guide you through the process. The completed empathy map will serve as a valuable tool when you actually sit down to create your product vision.

With these resources in hand, your team can define your product vision. You can use this simple, concise format to tell a compelling product story that resonates with your audience.



3. Co-create your product vision

There's no one-size-fits-all format for a product vision, but there are tried-and-true templates you can use as a jumping-off point. This is a classic, fill-in-the-blank format you can use to guide your thinking.

is for **who** .

PRODUCT TARGET CUSTOMER STATEMENT OF NEED OR OPPORTUNITY

The **is a** **that** .

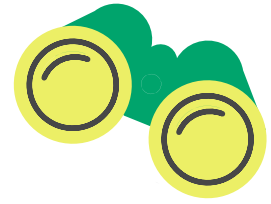
PRODUCT NAME PRODUCT CATEGORY KEY BENEFIT, REASON TO BUY

Unlike **our products** .

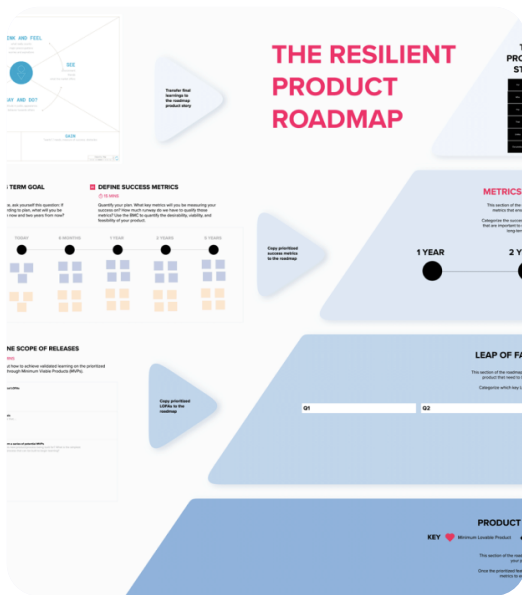
PRIMARY COMPETITOR STATEMENT OF PRIMARY DIFFERENTIATION

This template, which is adapted from *Crossing the Chasm* by Geoffrey Moore, was originally intended for creating product positioning statements. While positioning refers to the space your product occupies in the market, your product vision should be more aspirational and ambitious.

And with that, you have a clear, concise product vision. But remember: creating your vision is step one, but documenting it and weaving it into the fabric of your Product organization is critical for making it a reality. Write it down, share it out, and make sure everyone working on the product knows it like the back of their hand.



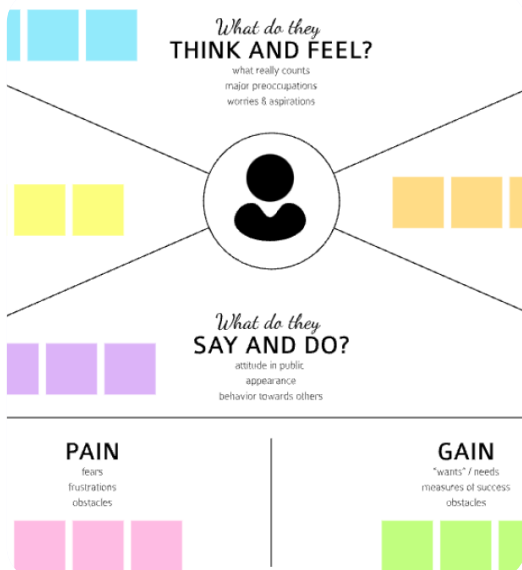
Templates



Resilient product roadmap template

Use this template to plan a series of collaboration sessions that will help your teams define a product vision and execute a more strategic roadmap. End-to-end involvement from product management, product design, and engineering teams will help you deliver the most strategic impact with this template.

[Get the template](#)



Empathy map canvas template

Get to know your users more deeply with this template. It gives your teams the foundational information they need to understand and connect with users — and ultimately, to be passionate about solving their challenges.

[Get the template](#)



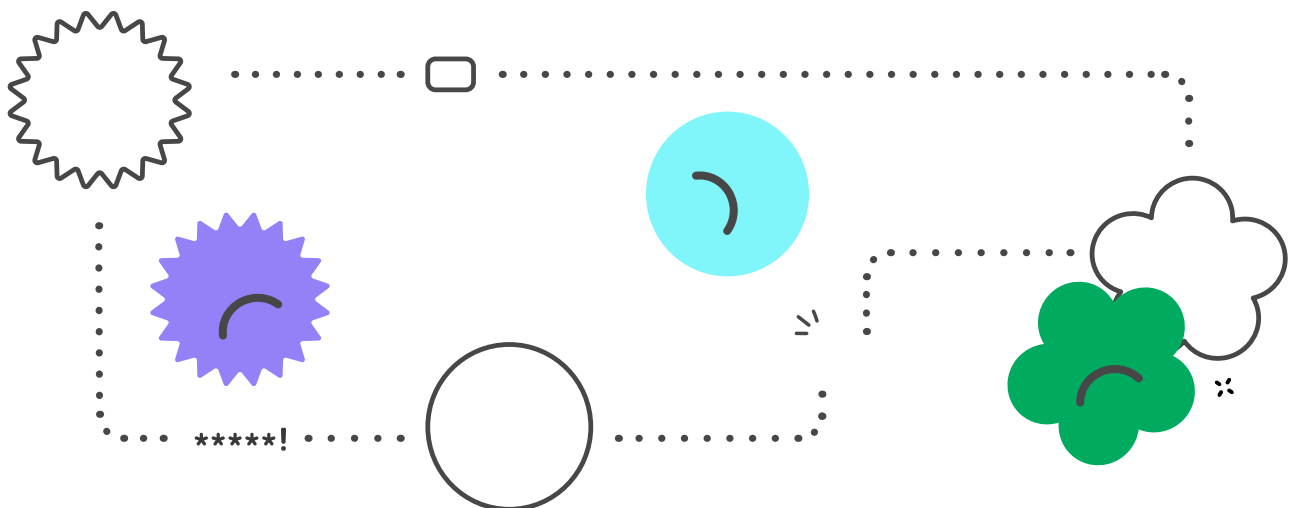
Chapter Three

Process

Keep everyone aligned around day-to-day processes and the big picture

No matter what methodologies your teams use — Agile, SAFe, Kanban, design thinking, Lean UX, etc. — you can help your team collaborate within a shared framework. However, these methodologies aren't always prescriptive, and it can be difficult to keep everyone aligned across various PDE teams. This is especially true when different teams use different methodologies and processes.

When team members are disconnected from shared processes, it leads to lack of engagement, feeling of overwhelm, disorganization, poor communication, and misalignment. This manifests in missed deadlines, projects going over budget, and end-users feeling frustrated with the product. everyone feels a sense of ownership over the future of the product.





Process and alignment might be a challenge for your teams if you hear any of the following.

From team members

"We keep missing deadlines, even when they feel realistic."

*****!

"There's a lack of ownership among various teams and roles."

"We don't have a clear definition of done."



From customers

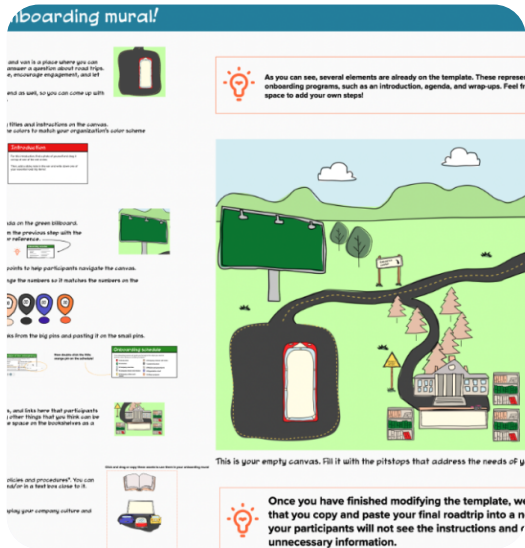
"I wish you were more transparent about your product roadmap."

"This feature was promised months ago, but it hasn't been launched yet."

"Your product releases seem to prioritize flashy new features while ignoring bugs and existing functionality."



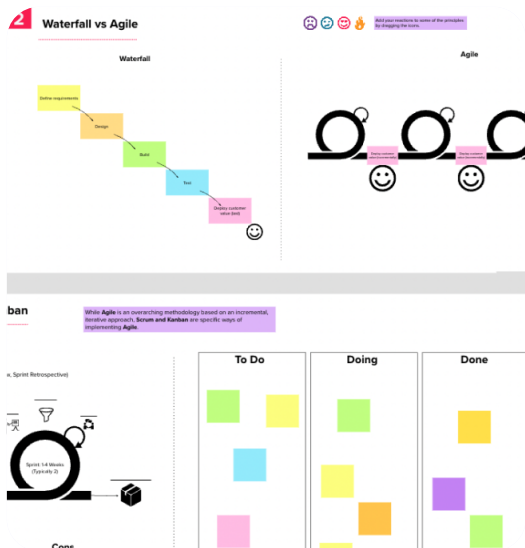
Templates



Onboarding template

This template is perfect for onboarding new team members and getting them familiar with your teams, technology, and processes. When you're unable to meet face-to-face, facilitating onboarding through MURAL provides a fun way to interact that represents the real world experience.

[Get the template](#)



Agile training template

Use this template to teach people who are new to Agile the basics of the methodology and how your team practices it. They'll learn how to implement Agile using Scrum, Kanban, and SAFe® (Scaled Agile Framework), as well as how Agile differs from waterfall product management.

[Get the template](#)





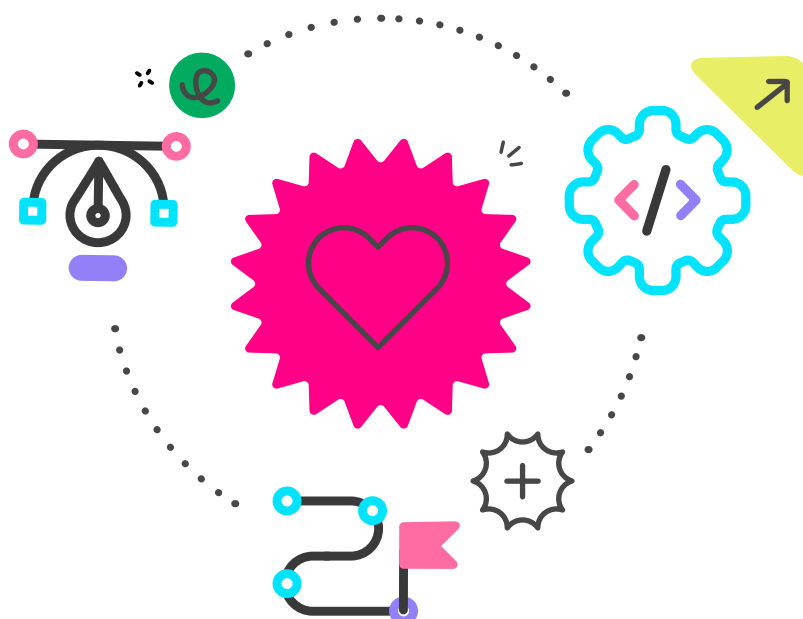
Chapter Four

Play

Encourage imagination, creativity, and playfulness at work

Happy, playful employees are more engaged, more productive, and more invested in the work they do. For Product, Design, and Engineering teams in particular, having fun at work is instrumental in encouraging creative solutions to difficult problems.

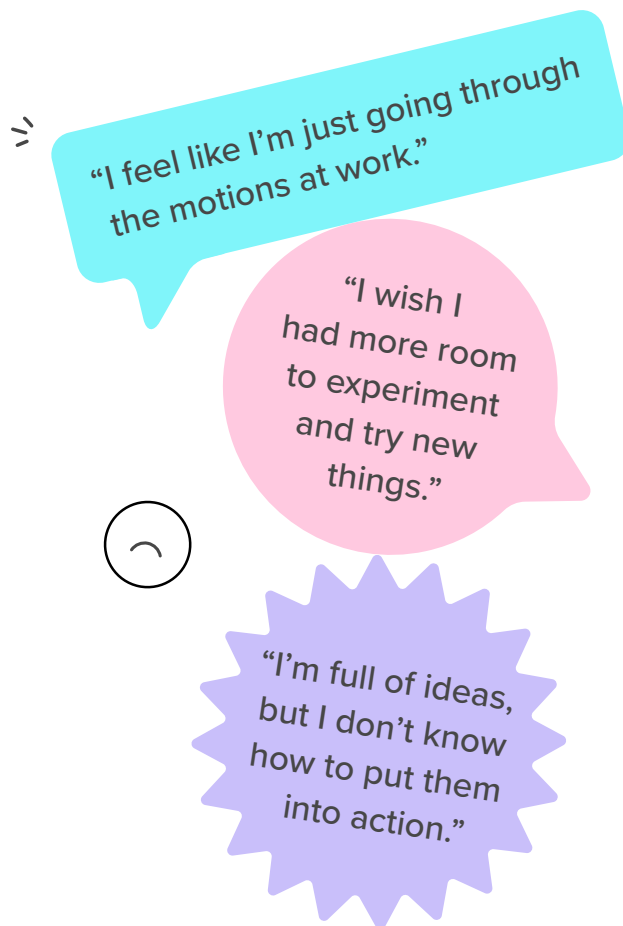
For some organizations, imagination is relegated to the design team — but it shouldn't be that way. Everyone, from developers to the product owner, should feel free to imagine and be creative at work. After all, teams that feel uninspired, who aren't being inspired to think creatively, will naturally have a lower innovation capacity. On the flipside, teams that encourage play and creative thinking can unlock the entire potential of the team so that ideas are never lost and innovation is a given.





Purpose and passion might be a challenge for your teams if you hear any of the following.

| From team members



| From customers





Solutions

There are endless ways to spark creativity among your Product, Design, and Engineering teams. Let's take a look at five ways to get started.

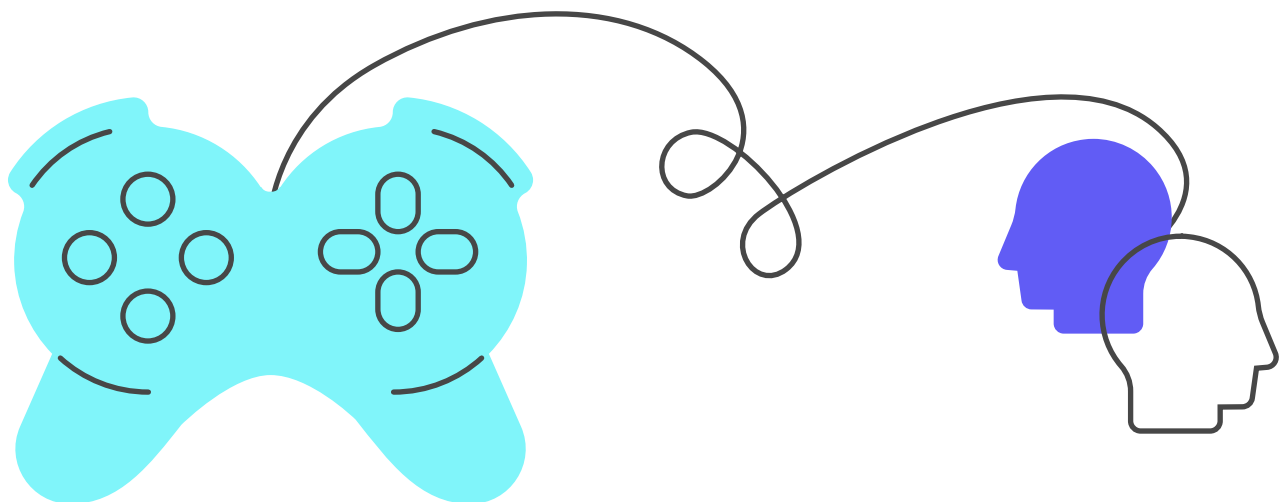
1. Gamify user research

Gamify user research to understand what your users value the most (and why) while bringing some excitement to the process. “Buy a Feature” is an activity designed to help elicit the truth about what people value, not just what they say they value. It's a method for prioritization that provides people with a limited amount of currency that they can use to “purchase” what they prioritize the most. The resulting decisions are valuable in assessing what features or concepts should be present in the final design.

Use this activity when you:

- Conduct user research
- Understand what your users value the most (and why)
- Prioritize potential product features

[Get our buy a feature template.](#)





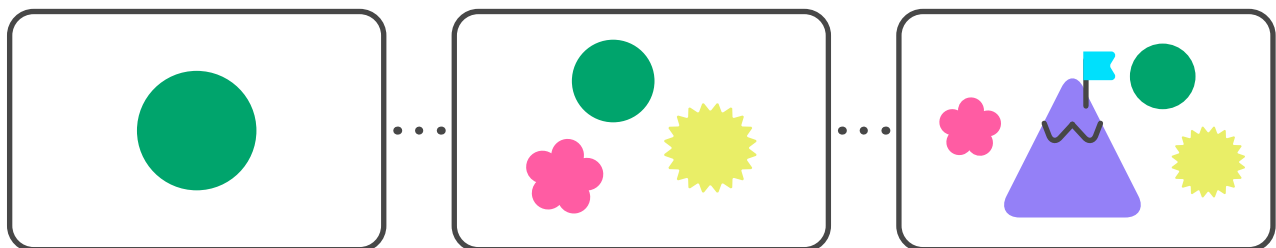
2. Use storyboarding to communicate visually

A storyboard is a visual device used to demonstrate a narrative or illustrate a concept by showing panels of your story in a linear order. Because storyboards are built using images, they can help teams communicate ideas more clearly and evocatively than words alone. Storyboards don't have to be masterful pieces of artwork; even the most basic drawings can help your developers, designers, and more envision the possibilities of new experiences and get aligned on the right path forward.

Use storyboarding when you need to:

- Walk through different approaches to a challenge
- Visualize the user experience
- Explore different possible product flows
- Get aligned on your product vision
- Create customer journey maps that tell a story

[Get our storyboarding template.](#)





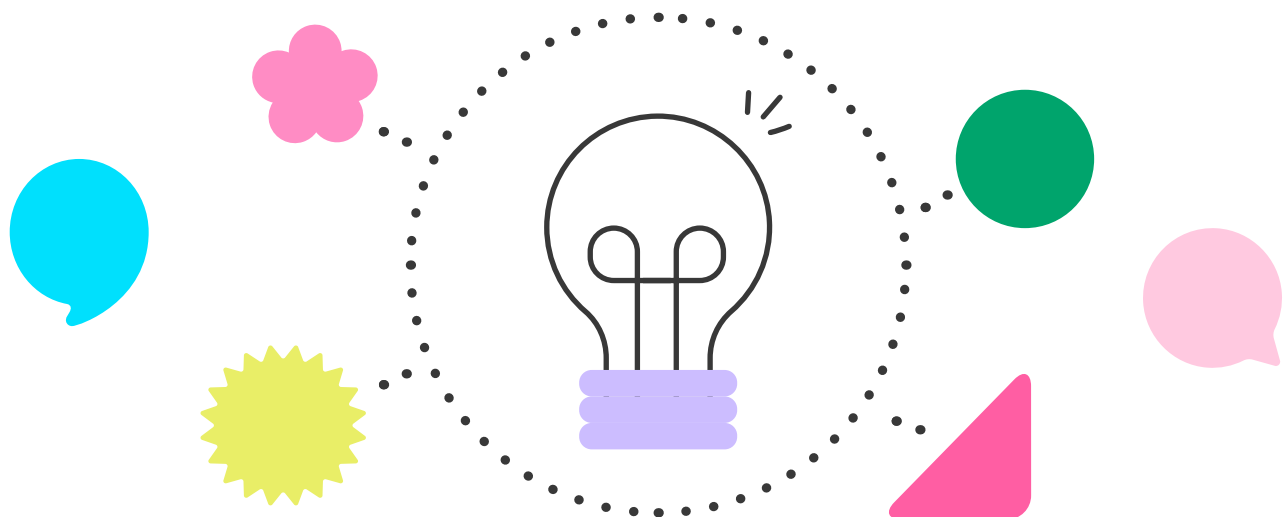
3. Brainstorm and visualize connections with mind mapping

A mind map is a brainstorming tool designed to help you visually track, organize, and structure your thoughts and ideas. Mind maps are diagrams with ideas branching from one central concept or idea, and are designed to organize information and synthesize ideas. Because of their visual, interconnected nature, mind maps lend themselves to the way many developers naturally organize their thoughts. They're also excellent for bringing disparate thoughts and ideas from multiple teams — UX Design, UX Research, Product Development, etc. — into one central place.

Use mind mapping when you need to:

- Brainstorm with a group
- Identify product requirements
- Understand your users
- Visualize connections between different concepts
- Think about a problem from multiple angles

[Get our mind mapping template.](#)





4. Facilitate a Lightning Decision Jam

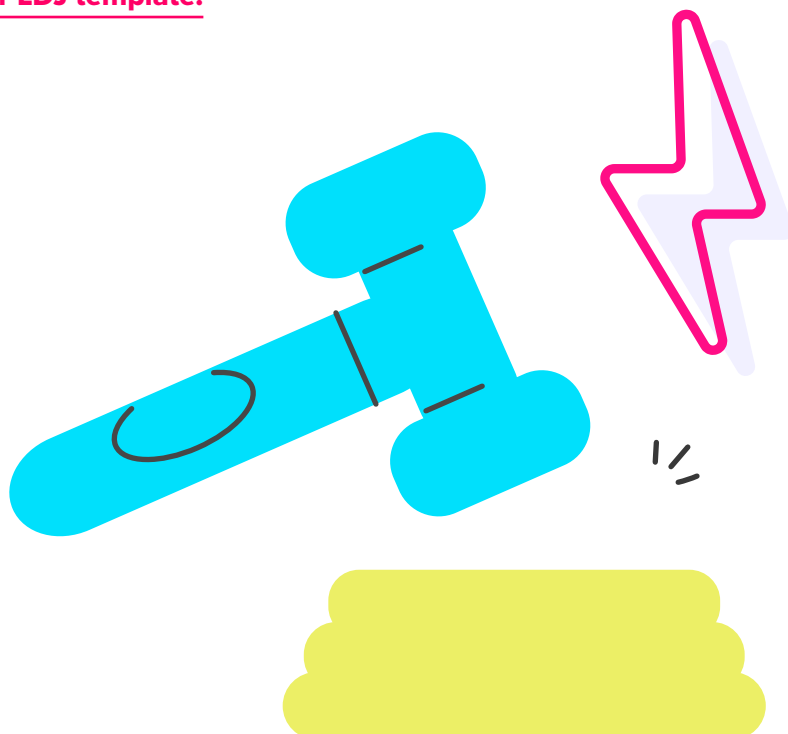
“The problem with anything that requires creative and critical thinking,” writes Jonathan Courtney, the creator of AJ&Smart’s Lightning Decision Jam, “is that it’s easy to get lost, lose focus, and fall into the trap of having useless, open-ended, unstructured discussions.” This leads to frustrated team members, busted budgets, missed deadlines, and lackluster releases — “all because the team is so fatigued from working on endless, unprioritized problems.”

That’s where the LDJ comes in. It’s designed to replace all open, unstructured discussion with clear process.

Try this activity when you need to:

- Solve a complex problem quickly
- Streamline the decision-making process

[Get our LDJ template.](#)





5. Be inclusive and empathetic in your approach

These suggestions are all about trying new things, experimenting, and thinking creatively. For some people, mixing up their environment and routine can create a hotbed for new perspectives and good ideas. For others, however, new routines and activities can lead to stress and ultimately reduce creativity — some people simply work better in more predictable environments.

You can (and should!) still mix things up, but it's best to give everyone a heads up before trying something new. When you set expectations and give your team time to prepare for workshops and other deviations from the norm, you're giving them the opportunity to show up as their best selves.

After you try something new, get your team's feedback on it and adjust accordingly. To gather honest feedback about bigger initiatives, like workshops, you can run a quick retrospective at the end of the session.

Most importantly, focus on creating psychological safety. Psychological safety describes a team culture built upon mutual respect in which people are comfortable speaking their minds, taking risks, and trying new things without fear of repercussions. Psychological safety is built over time, so try incorporating new ideas gradually and see what works best for your team.





Templates

1 Topic Click to select and drag

Add topic to explore

Creative organisations	Charities and public service	Innovative business and operating models	Individual people	Small customer service and experience	Luxury experiences	Global reach and footprint
Amazon	Amnesty International	Conoco	Elon Musk	A&P	BMW	FedEx
Apple	Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts	Google	J.K. Rowling	Nike	Louis Vuitton	International Space Station
Cirque du Soleil	Doctors Without Borders	Netflix	Oprah Winfrey	Norstrom's	The Four Seasons	The Olympics
Disney	Habitat for Humanity	Tesla	Taylor Swift	Starbucks	Virgin Atlantic	The United Nations
NASA	National Park Service	Uber	Your Grandmother	Zappos	Whole Foods Market	The World Cup
Write your own	Write your own	Write your own	Write your own	Write your own	Write your own	Write your own

2 Explore Add notes inspired by each Alternative World

Creative brainstorming template

Take a playful approach to brainstorming with this exercise from LUMA that encourages your team to look at common things in uncommon ways. By asking the question “What would ____ do?” you can break from conventional thinking and jump-start your team’s creativity.

[Get the template](#)

Starting point for Person 2

Starting Point for Person 1

CHALLENGE
How might we (copy challenge statement here)

Proposed solution
What is a promising way to address the challenge?
Use words, icons, images, diagrams, or drawings to illustrate the idea.
10 minutes

Why it will fail
Why do you think this idea/concept will fail? Why not?
What lessons do you learn?
5 minutes

After the critique, return to the challenge statement

After the critique, return to the challenge statement

Problem solving template

Co-create innovative solutions to a challenge using this LUMA template. Start with a “how might we” question, generate bold ideas, and poke holes in those ideas to ensure you’re considering potential pitfalls and arriving at the best solution.

[Get the template](#)





Conclusion

Disconnection is a massive challenge for Product, Design, and Engineering teams today, especially in remote and hybrid work environments. The most effective PDE organizations combat this challenge with the four Ps — they proactively build connections and trust among **people**, create a shared sense of **purpose**, align with clear **processes**, and encourage creative thinking through **play**.

When you intentionally create these connections, you build a highly engaged team. You give everyone from the product owner to the scrum master, the designers to the developers, a shared mission. They feel invested and they're able to do their best work, with fewer missed deadlines, frustrating miscommunications, and mediocre meetings. Ultimately, this leads to a more productive team, less employee attrition, and more innovative products.

Connect your PDE teams with MURAL

MURAL connects teams with a digital whiteboard and collaboration features designed to inspire innovation. Give your Product, Design, and Engineering teams a shared workspace to get aligned, get creative, and solve hard problems together.

Try MURAL, free forever.

