

CASE STUDY · MERKLE (dentsu) : GLOBAL DESIGN PRACTISE TRANSFORMATION

Human Led, Agent Powered Design Capability Transformation.

A modern Design Delivery model, scaled for the speed of customer needs that I built and implemented globally for all studios. Replacing the double diamond for 350 designers.

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The problem was the traditional design model was broken for a brave new world.

The classic double diamond philosophy wasn't failing because the designers were bad. It was failing because the model was built for a different world that no longer existed and Merkle was falling behind.

Linear by design

Research fed define. Define fed develop. Develop fed deliver. By the time work arrived, the brief had moved.

No parallel execution

One phase had to complete before the next began. In an AI-enabled world, that sequencing is a competitive liability.

Handoffs as failure points

Every transition between design and engineering lost context, fidelity, and time. The double diamond assumed clean handoffs exist.

No agent support layer

Volume work — research synthesis, journey mapping, variant generation — consumed senior designers. Agents could handle all of it.

What I built to replace it.

1. A new philosophy

Human-Led. AI-Enabled. Agent-Powered. Humans own direction, judgment, and accountability. Agents handle execution, automation, and scale. Not AI-first. A specific position on where the line is.

2. A new framework

X4 IGNITE. Three phases running in parallel: Ignite the Engine, Concept at Scale, Forge in Parallel. Infrastructure live before concepts begin. Design and engineering collapsing into a single motion.

3. A new delivery model

Pod-based teams cast for the engagement, not the org chart. Human-to-agent ratio set by complexity. 15+ AI agents defined, built, and integrated across the full design lifecycle.

X4 IGNITE : DELIVERY IN AN AGENTIC DESIGN WORLD

THREE PHASES : RUNNING FASTER THAN THE DOUBLE DIAMOND COULD RUN ONE

PHASE 01

Ignite the Engine

2 weeks

The infrastructure is live before design begins. Tokens, tooling, AI context. Everything the sprint needs to move without friction is in place on day one.

PHASE 02

Concept at Scale

3 weeks

North Star vision translated into composable XD concepts. AI prototyping, AI concept testing, AI-facilitated user stories — all running in parallel with human concepting.

PHASE 03

Forge in Parallel

8-10 weeks

Pods form around capabilities, not handoffs. Design and engineering collapse into one motion. Every component production-ready. Change management runs concurrently.

THE AI POWERED DESIGN
& ENGINEERING
APPROACH

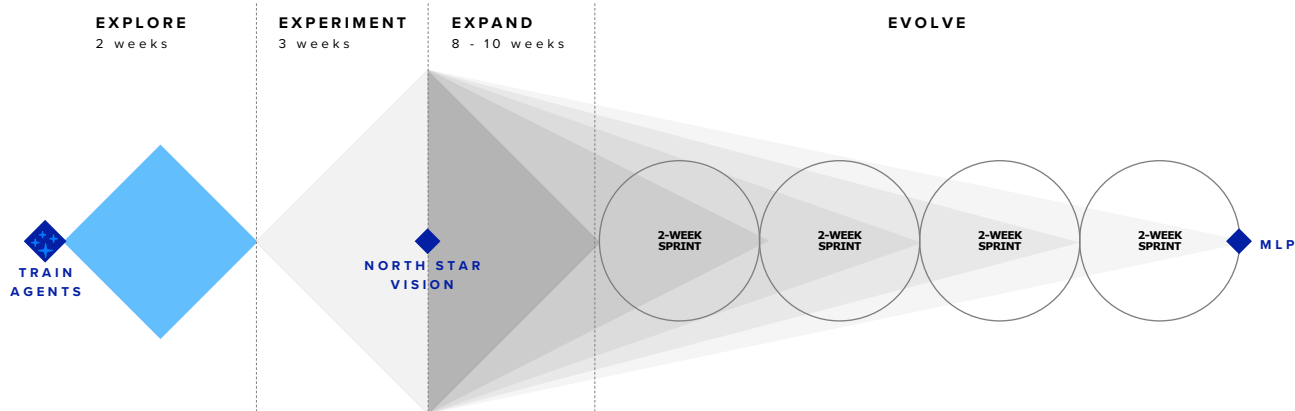
From vision to system with X⁴ IGNITE

X⁴ IGNITE is how **design engineering** gets delivered.

Rooted in efficiency and impact, we unify Strategy, Design, Engineering and Research to turn creative vision into a scalable system.

The result is an ecosystem designed to scale, adapt, and continuously evolve.

Merkle's continuous human-led, agent-powered approach



Ignite the Engine

The engine doesn't wait for design to start — it starts before it. In two weeks, we lay the design and engineering foundation that makes every moment that follows faster, more consistent, and harder to derail. Tokens, tooling, and context. All of it live before concepts begin.



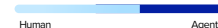
Concept at Scale

Translating the vision into tangible XD Concepts, defining high impact patterns across key journeys. By applying Atomic Design principles, we ensure these concepts are broken down into a scalable framework optimized for a composable stack, that can be used across digital experiences, dropping dev debt later.



Forge in Parallel

Pods form around capabilities, not handoffs. Design and engineering collapse into a single motion — every component composable, every sprint production-ready. Change management and training run in parallel, so the org is ready the moment the system is.



INPUTS

- Brand guidelines
- Journey maps
- Heuristics
- Primary research
- API and Integration Inventory
- Content Taxonomy
- Functionality Discovery

- AI prototyping
- AI concept testing and validation
- AI Facilitated User Stories
- Automated Design Token Extraction
- Intelligent Road mapping and Planning
- Human design conceptualing

- Human detailed design
- AI prototyping
- AI A/B concept testing ongoing
- Automated CMS Component Scaffolding
- AI Code Assistance and Review
- AI Assisted Functional, Performance, Security and Visual Testing
- Intelligent data transformation and migration

AI TOOLING

- Claude
- Figma MCP
- Askable
- Dovetail
- Perplexity

- Claude
- Askable
- Figma Make
- Galileo
- Relume
- Claude Code
- Lovable
- Cursor Bolt
- Writer

- Claude
- Askable
- Figma Make
- Axel
- Claude Code
- Lovable
- Cursor Bolt
- Maze
- Firefly
- Co-Pilot
- V0
- Chromatic

The right mix for the right job

Human craft and judgment remain at the core, with AI continuously enhancing efforts at varying levels - all on a unified, scalable experience layer. This spans from people augmented by AI tools to autonomous agents operating within defined guardrails under human oversight

Human in the Loop

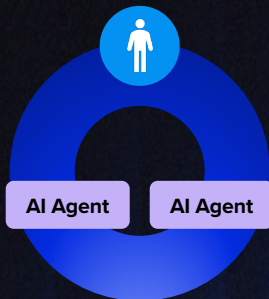
Creative and strategic work with
AI augmentation



- Human drives
- AI accelerates
- Least risk

Human on the Loop

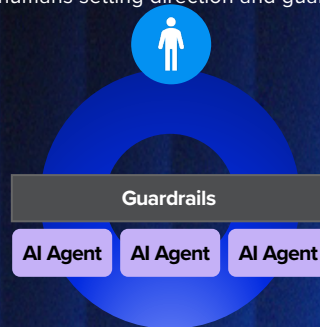
Agents working with real-time
human review



- Agents execute
- Human reviews and intervenes in real time to reduce risk

Human above the Loop

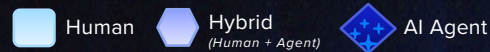
Agents operating autonomously,
humans setting direction and guardrails



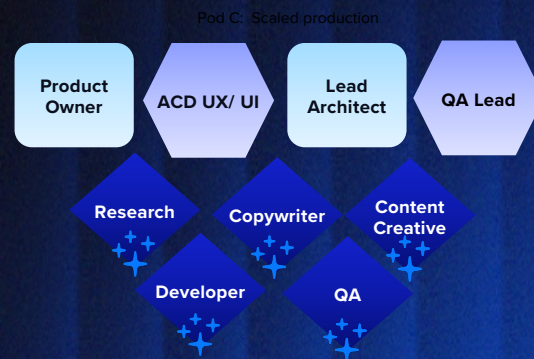
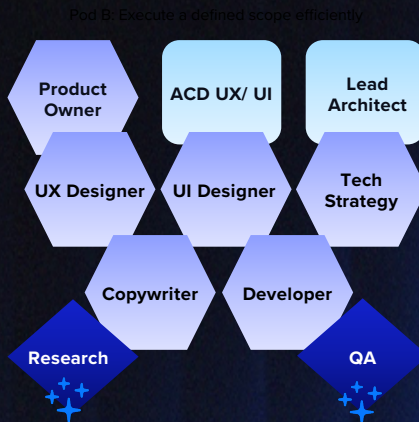
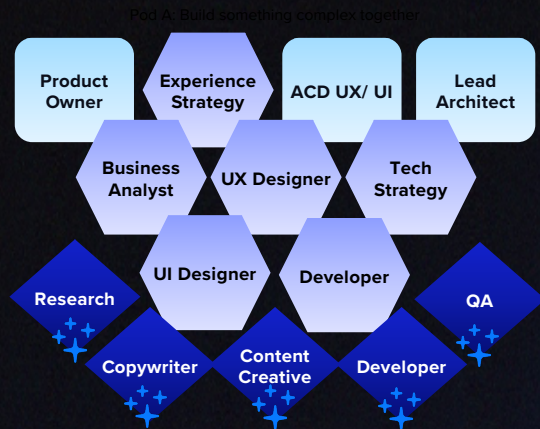
- Human sets direction
- Agents operate within pre-determined guardrails to reduce risk

One size fits none – each POD is cast with the right **HUMAN & AGENT** mix

Blending human judgment with AI execution



EXAMPLE POD STRUCTURES



15+ AI agents. Built, not theorized (see appendix for details)

Brief Distillation

Messy briefs in. Structured strategy brief out. Faster alignment from day one.

Research Synthesis

Qual + quant ingested. Insight clusters and unmet needs produced in days, not weeks.

Journey Mapping

Multi-persona maps with evidence citations, running in parallel. Hours, not weeks.

UI Variant Generation

20+ on-brand screen variants from approved concepts. Designers curate, not draw.

Design to Code

Figma MCP to production-grade code. Accessibility checked. PR ready for review.

System Governance

Design system health monitored continuously. Drift flagged automatically. Scales past manual review.

The value obtained.

BEFORE · Double Diamond

Linear phases. One finishes before the next begins.

Senior designers doing research synthesis and journey mapping.

Handoffs between design and engineering lose context and fidelity, increasing Tech debt and eating into budget.

One team model for every engagement.

No AI in the delivery workflow.

AFTER · X4 IGNITE + Agents

Parallel execution. Research, concepting, and build run simultaneously.

Agents handle volume work. Designers make the calls that matter.

Design & engineering in a single pod. One motion, one production-ready output.

Pods cast by complexity. Human-to-agent ratio set per engagement.

15+ agents integrated across the full lifecycle. Every step human-reviewable.

What this means for your organization

Most design functions are still running the double diamond and calling it agile. That gap is widening.

- I built a new delivery model for a 350-person global practice — not a pilot, a full practice transformation.
- I designed the agent library from scratch: 15+ AI agents with defined inputs, outputs, and team ownership.
- If your design function needs to integrate AI without losing quality or creative authority, I have already built the answer.

APPENDIX : Agent Candidates

These support north star activities

AGENT: Brief Distillation

Takes messy client briefs, SOWs, or kickoff notes and produces a structured strategy brief: problem, audience, constraints, success metrics, and open questions.

Key Outputs

- Structured one-page strategy brief
- Stakeholder assumption log
- Clarifying questions for client

Value by team

- Strategy — Spend time on thinking, not formatting
- XD — Clearer constraints before design begins
- All — Faster alignment from day one

AGENT: Competitive Research

Analyzes competitor digital experiences against a defined rubric (UX patterns, CX moments, personalization signals, GTM positioning, etc.) and identifies whitespace opportunities and saturated territory.

Key Outputs

- Differentiation opportunity summary
- Feature/pattern benchmarking matrix
- Experience gaps flagged by priority

Value by team

- XD — Audit coverage at scale without pulling senior designers
- Design Systems — Signal on which components cause friction
- All — Credible accessibility posture before client review

AGENT: Research Synthesis

Ingests qual and quant research (interviews, surveys, analytics) and surfaces themes, tensions, and opportunity spaces. Supports North Star visioning, roadmap definition, and stakeholder alignment.

Key Outputs

- Insight clusters with supporting evidence
- Unmet need statements ranked by frequency
- Draft "How Might We" prompts

Value by team

- Strategy — Rapid synthesis, getting to insights faster
- XD — Designs from evidence-backed insights with traceable rationale, making it easier to defend decisions
- All — Insight turnaround in days, not weeks

AGENT: Journey Mapping

Takes research transcripts, analytics logs, and support ticket data and produces structured journey maps showing user goals, actions, friction moments, and emotional states at each stage. Runs against multiple personas in parallel.

Key Outputs

- Multi-persona journey maps with evidence citations
- Friction heatmap ranked by user impact
- Opportunity moments tagged by experience stage

Value by team

- Strategy — Evidence-backed journey work that holds up in debate
- XD — Journey artifacts ready for critique in hours, not weeks
- All — Consistent journey framing across every workflow