

# Human-Centered Performance Management for Designers

by

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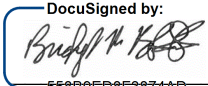
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## Abstract

The performance evaluation is ubiquitous in industry, but is sometimes regarded as an outdated tool. In particular, performance evaluations often fail to collect a true picture of a designer's value, fail to support the design manager in providing valuable management of the designer's performance, and fail to provide the design manager with the tools they need to advocate for design within the organization. This research explores what designers and design managers need for the evaluation to become a useful tool. Using a Human-Centered Design approach to the research process and human-centered principles around people management, this study covers the results of a review of the literature, discovery interviews, design thinking activities, and usability testing of a prototype. The outcome of this research is a depiction of the designer's journey through the performance management process and four behavioral archetypes which fall along a spectrum of analyst to artist. Further, usability testing showed what users may find useful in a performance management tool. Limitations and areas for further research are discussed.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	v
List of Figures.....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	4
Background on Performance Evaluation and Management .....	4
Beginnings.....	4
Successes and Failures .....	4
Modern Approaches to Performance Management.....	5
A More Human-Centered Approach .....	5
Using Data and Technology to Focus on the Future .....	7
Creativity Research .....	8
Creatives at Work.....	9
Conclusion.....	16
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	18
Human-Centered Approach.....	18
Inspiration Phase: Discovery through interviews.....	18
Background, Goals, and Questions .....	18
Participants .....	19
Interview Structure .....	21
Analysis and Synthesis Process.....	21

Outcomes of Inspiration Phase .....	23
Ideation Phase: Define, Design, and Develop .....	23
Background and Goals .....	23
User Stories .....	23
‘How Might We...’ .....	24
Creating a Content Model .....	24
Creating a User Flow .....	25
Designing a Prototype .....	25
Outcomes of Ideation Phase .....	25
Implementation Phase: Usability testing .....	25
Background, Goals, and Research Questions .....	25
Participants .....	26
Session Structure .....	27
Outcomes of Implementation Phase .....	27
Chapter 4: Inspiration Phase: Discovery interview results.....	28
General Experiences and Complaints with Current Systems .....	28
Examining the Journey .....	30
Stage 1: Setting a direction.....	30
Stage 2: Monitoring progress .....	34
Stage 3: Getting and implementing feedback.....	35
Stage 4: Reflection .....	37
Stage 5: Evaluation.....	38

Examining the Users.....	42
User Psychology .....	42
Identifying Behavioral Archetypes.....	44
Responses to Initial Concepts.....	54
Strengths .....	55
Areas for Further Development and Exploration .....	56
Chapter 5: Ideation Phase: Define, design, and develop .....	60
Divergent Thinking Activities .....	60
Convergent Thinking Activities .....	62
Creating a Content Model .....	62
Creating a User Flow .....	65
Building a Prototype to Test.....	67
Chapter 6: Implementation Phase: Usability testing results.....	69
Testing Results .....	69
Usefulness.....	69
Understanding the Context of the Scenario and Tool .....	70
Emotional and Mental Toll.....	71
The Value and Purpose of Reflection.....	72
Response to Goal-Setting Model.....	73
Tracking Soft Skills .....	74
Reflection Process .....	74
Response to ‘Looking Forward.’ .....	75

Comparison to Portfolio .....	75
Experience of Entering Content .....	75
What is Shared and What is Private .....	77
Usability Issues.....	78
Chapter 7: Conclusion .....	80
Limitations of this Study .....	80
Recommendations for Further Research .....	81
Alternative Methods .....	81
Additional Topics .....	81
References .....	82
Appendix A: Initial Sketches.....	86
Appendix B: User Journey Map .....	87
Appendix C: The Achiever Archetype .....	88
Appendix D: The Sage Archetype.....	89
Appendix E: The Maverick Archetype.....	90
Appendix F: The Explorer Archetype .....	91
Appendix G: Content Model .....	92
Appendix H: User Flow.....	93
Appendix I: Final Prototype .....	94

## List of Tables

Table 1. Discovery Interviews: Participants’ role, field, years of experience, and size of company where they currently work .....	20
Table 2. Usability Testing: Participants’ role, field, years of experience, and size of company where they currently work .....	26
Table 3. Ideation Theme (User Stories): Leveraging the value of reflection .....	60
Table 4. Ideation Theme (User Stories): Measuring and tracking projects and goals .....	61
Table 5. Ideation Theme (HMW Statements): Leveraging the value of reflection .....	61
Table 6. Ideation Theme (HMW Statements): Measuring and tracking projects and goals .....	62
Table 7. Inspiration: A consolidated experience .....	62
Table 8. Inspiration: A flexible way to track goals .....	64
Table 9. Inspiration: A visualization of success instead of a quantitative metric .....	64
Table 10. Inspiration: Tracking soft skills and technical skills .....	64
Table 11. Inspiration: Setting an action status.....	65
Table 12. Inspiration: Creating a conversational flow .....	65
Table 13. Inspiration: Asking the right questions .....	66
Table 14. Inspiration: Divided into digestible segments .....	67
Table 15. Inspiration: Story view .....	67
Table 16. Inspiration: Documenting progress and success .....	68
Table 17. Inspiration: Flexibility to add or adjust goals at any time .....	68
Table 18 Inspiration: Ability to add documents .....	68



**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Analyst/Artist spectrum .....47

Figure 2. Text input field.....77

Figure 3. ‘About this Intention’ link was too easy to overlook.....79

Figure 4. The ‘Review’ label was confusing to some .....80

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Performance evaluations are common practice, but they are often ineffective (Aguinis et al., 2011). This has been a recognized problem for some time; the market has changed, jobs have changed, but the performance evaluation has not. Many performance evaluations result in wasted man hours and lagging employee engagement, rather than being a tool to help employees invest in and succeed at their careers. Specifically for designers in the creative industry, the performance evaluation is often an ineffective tool to track the growth and value of an employee.

For a designer, the performance evaluation should provide an opportunity to reflect on growth, highlight progress to their manager, get feedback, and support the development of goals for the next evaluation cycle. Unfortunately, an ineffective performance evaluation can cause a designer to “stay in the same position for years on end and never seem to be paid exactly what they're worth” (Creative Bloq Staff, 2010, para. 2).

One of the shortfalls of the performance evaluation when used by designers is that the evaluation typically tracks a specific kind of value. However, the traditional metrics of the performance evaluation prioritize productivity and output that can be measured when much of a designer's value is not necessarily reflected in high output.

The evaluation does not serve the needs of many design managers either. The manager's role is typically to provide the evaluation in addition to setting goals with the employee, removing barriers, encouraging, and coaching the designer. The manager also advocates for the designer and the value of design to those in leadership. Instead, the evaluation collects data points that are designed to support Human Resources, Operations and leadership in evaluating system-wide efficiencies and areas of waste. It does not report data points that help the design manager support the designer or advocate for design's impact within an organization. In a 2021 survey of 1,000 designers, design managers say they need more effective documentation: “58% of design leaders said the ability to measure and quantify the impact of their team's work would make design more valuable at the organizational level” (Abstract, 2021, para. 12).

Traditionally, an annual evaluation would be the primary or only effort made to provide an employee with feedback or grounds for promotion. Many companies, to their detriment, still think of performance management in this way: “this annual review remains the primary tool for evaluating employees and rewarding performance” (Schrage, Kiron, Hancock et. al, 2019, p. 3). However, some companies have adopted a larger ecosystem called ‘performance management’

that focuses not only on evaluating the employee but also on encouraging their development. In performance management, the performance evaluation is just a place to *start* in providing services to support employee growth.

Employers must invest in performance management to avoid losing employees to competitors. Employee's expectations for employers are higher now than when performance evaluation was introduced. Employees do not often leave a job because of a poor performance evaluation tool, but they may leave because their employer did not provide fair compensation, a clear path for advancement, or an investment in their growth — the elements provided through high-quality performance management. The employee turnover resulting from such conditions can lead to the business cost of hiring and training new employees. A workforce that is constantly turning over is a financial drain and operates at a slower pace due to the time it takes to onboard new people (Verasai, 2021). The workforce is the key to holding a competitive place in the market.

A well-designed performance evaluation can be a powerful tool in positively impacting preferable employee behaviors, such as seeking learning opportunities, increasing engagement, and demonstrating company values. It is important to encourage employees to seek learning opportunities because improved skills increase the employee's value to the company. Engagement is important because it impacts retention; disengaged employees are less productive and more likely to quit. Lastly, the performance evaluation can encourage employees to think of ways they demonstrate company values. This helps create the culture and service the business aims for. A well-designed performance evaluation tool can encourage designers and design managers to think in ways that reflect the larger goals of performance management.

Designers should have an evaluation that is created with the same care that they put into their own projects. It should encourage their growth, highlight their value, and track their efforts fairly. Design managers should get relevant data from the evaluation that helps them support their designers and advocate for their designers and teams. The evaluation should track metrics that recognize values of different types. The evaluation should be a tool to help design teams “measure and document work so they can continue to scale and contribute to business outcomes in a more meaningful way” (Abstract, 2021, para. 38).

To begin to address this problem, this project will explore what a human-centered approach to performance management for designers might look like. This research will use a

Human-Centered Design (HCD) research methodology, as well as a human-centered mindset for managing employee performance. In *Creative Culture*, Justin Dauer writes: “a ‘human-centered mindset’ means people are at the center of everything in a business: empathy and compassion guide our hand across personnel, process, and product” (Dauer, 2020, p. 116). Approaching evaluation with an HCD mindset will provide learnings that can be applied to performance management in many fields.

Taking a human-centered approach to a new performance evaluation tool will focus on a solution that supports designer growth, improves the service of performance management, and improves employee engagement, thus increasing productivity, value generation and decreasing employee turnover.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Creativity has struggled to be seen as relevant in the business world due to its immeasurable nature. To explore what this means for those in creative professions, this chapter explores the problem space and what has already been learned.

### Background on Performance Evaluation and Management

#### *Beginnings*

The performance evaluation, or the process of measuring and rating employees dates back to ancient China; however, modern research on the topic did not begin until the 1920s (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of ‘scientific management’ was being adopted. Created by Fredrick Winslow Taylor, an American mechanical engineer, this concept proposed that businesses could be more efficient and therefore more profitable if they could find and repeat a ‘one best way’ to create a product. To be fast, productive, and efficient became the chief goal among businesses; the common belief was that what could not be measured should not be considered. Management theory at this time and throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century considered quantitative measurements to have primary importance: “measurements of time, of mass, of efficiency, of skills, of productivity, of motivation, of units, of value, of targets and of every other facet of production that is amenable to measurement or for which a unit of measure could be invented” (Torr, 2008, p. 17). This mindset actually persists today, as Christina Wodtke writes in her 2015 book, *Radical Focus*: “Teams today are all too often feature factories, with little regard for whether or not the features actually solve the underlying business problems. Progress is measured by output and not outcome” (p. 7).

Performance evaluations grew in popularity in the 1960s and 1970s. The goal of the annual review at this time was to have a uniform process that measured the same indicators across departments with little room for interpretation or flexibility (Wigert & Harter, 2017).

#### *Successes and Failures*

Though the failures outweigh the successes, it would be unfair not to acknowledge why the performance evaluation is still in use — it must be doing *something* right. Performance evaluations help fulfill legal compliance by compiling documentation to justify firings, promotions and fair treatment. Performance evaluations ensure a minimal relationship between the manager and employee: “the traditional review enforces a process in which employees and

managers must discuss performance... its better than nothing” (Mosley 2013, p. 58). They also satisfy the need to measure something: “although its data are flawed, the traditional review can potentially render insights into employee strengths and weaknesses as a whole and can connect employee performance with overall financial performance” (Mosley 2013, p. 58) Unfortunately, the desire for uniform measurements, used by company leaders to make business decisions, often overlooks the contributions, unique qualifications, and skills of the individual. This is especially true when evaluating designers.

### **Modern Approaches to Performance Management**

Managing performance today shows how these two opposites (human vs. machine, creativity vs. measurement) are coming to the forefront. Today many businesses aim to encourage soft skills (leadership, conflict resolution, teamwork), behavior (decision-making, demonstrating company values), and problem solving: “The more our machines and computers take over tasks once performed by humans, the more attention needs to be paid to the most human characteristics” (Mosley & Irvine, 2020, Introduction). Many employers now seek to acknowledge the employee as a whole person that exists outside of business hours, and encourage performance that makes employees more human rather than more machine-like: “The qualities that make us most human — connection, community, positivity, belonging, and a sense of meaning — have become the corporate fuel for getting things done, for innovating, for thriving in the global marketplace, and for outperforming the competition” (Mosley & Irvine, 2020, Introduction).

Businesses are ramping up the human-element through coaching and trust, investing in learning opportunities, taking a continuous approach to performance management, and focusing on employee engagement. Companies seek to rely on big data and modern technology to provide individualization and a focus on the future rather than a uniform review of the past.

### ***A More Human-Centered Approach***

**Coaching and trust.** Ideally, the manager’s role is more of a coach than the traditional idea of a ‘boss’ (Bersin et al., 2021). Mutual respect between manager and employee is the base on which to build a successful coaching relationship. This means ongoing communication, feedback, and guidance rather than strictly “rating, ranking, and reviewing” (Schrage, Kiron, Hancock, et. al, 2019, p. 10).

**Learning.** Organizations that want to encourage innovation “implement performance management systems that have a heavy developmental component and enhance intrinsic motivation and performance” (Kuvaas, 2007, as cited in Kremer et al., 2019, p. 8). The future of performance management will continue to encourage employees to learn new skills. As technology develops more rapidly, skills that once might have lasted an entire career now become outdated within 5–10 years (Schrage et al., 2019). Rather than focusing merely on outcomes, wise companies now judge the value of an employee by whether they can acquire and retain new skills. While output may be a pass/fail measure, learning is an investment in the future. Dr. Britt Andreatta, a top LinkedIn Learning Instructor explains how an over-emphasis on achieving outcomes can lead to negative impacts on the employee’s behavior: the employee’s mindset:

Employees tend to ‘stay in their lane’ and focus on their strengths. They think, if I take this risk and don’t hit my outcome, then this is not worth my time. Outcomes are important, but make that 70% of the score, and have learning and growing be 30% of the score. (LinkedIn Learning, n.d., para. 32)

**Continuous evaluation.** The most successful companies take a more continuous approach to performance management: “Research shows that 54 percent of high-performing organizations provide feedback at least quarterly, compared with 35 percent of all others. Of those high performers, more than 30 percent require performance discussions on a monthly or even more frequent basis” (Mosley & Irvine, 2020, p. 18). This more frequent approach matches the iterative nature of work today, which moves at a much faster pace. More frequent check-ins also enhance the employee’s understanding of their job — instead of a list of tasks to check off, they begin working towards more strategic outcomes (Mosley & Irvine, 2020).

More frequent performance evaluation and performance management activities give employees more opportunities to get feedback and for the manager and employee to align on what is important. In *Radical Focus*, Wodtke shares an insight from Deidre Paknad, CEO of Workboard:

Use continuous conversations to coach and calibrate... on three things: engagement, performance and alignment. We use five levels for each and recommend both manager and employee share their view so perception gaps can be addressed quickly. End of year,

your employees had 24 conversations with opportunities to improve and recognition — it's more authentic, builds skill and improves performance. (2015, p. 265)

**Engagement.** In a Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey of respondents in the HR field and company leadership, more than 90% of respondents believed that “employee engagement is critical to their business’s success” (2019, p. 1). Engagement is “the degree to which employees invest their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energies toward positive organizational outcomes” (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, 2019, p. 2). Higher employee engagement leads to reduced turnover and increased productivity because engaged employees are more creative, collaborative and are more likely to seek out feedback on their performance. In one case, investing in employee engagement was even tied to increased stock price (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, 2019).

Thus, balancing the emphasis on both development and performance is the key to success: “PM approaches that focus too heavily on ratings, rankings, and compliance can have a negative impact on engagement. At the same time, processes that focus only on development and engagement and aren’t linked to performance management may not serve the organization’s best interests” (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, 2019, p. 2). Performance management can increase engagement by balancing “both aspects in a continuous process with a focus on development (versus assessment alone)” (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, 2019, p. 3).

The manager plays a crucial role in helping the employee grow their strengths, which in turn increases the employee’s engagement: “Respondents say employees’ relationship with their manager or supervisor has a greater impact on engagement than anything else” (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, 2019, p. 6). Additionally, the level of engagement that the manager has can positively impact the level of engagement the employee has: “If the manager’s engagement increases by 1%, that increases the engagement level of the staff by 2.13%” (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, 2019, p. 8).

### ***Using Data and Technology to Focus on the Future***

In the future, successful performance management will depend on a company’s willingness to move toward individualization rather than standardization. With modern technology, “digital performance management platforms make such customization simpler,



cheaper, and more scalable, which, in turn, makes performance management an enterprise-wide capability, not just the elite province of the top performers” (Schrage et al., 2019, p.12).

Some companies use Performance Management Software (PMS), which provides features that facilitate the performance evaluation process, may enable 360-degree feedback (which means collecting feedback from peers and subordinates as well as managers), help employees track goals, compare individual performance to company goals, include a dashboard of progress, and collect historical performance data (G2, 2020). However, some tools cater more to the needs of Human Resources and include payroll features, while others focus more on supporting feedback and recognition between employees. Such tools can ease a heavy administrative burden and are meant to increase engagement.

### **Creativity Research**

Creativity is particularly hard to measure or observe; this is evident historically in how creativity research developed. The triggering event for modern creativity research occurred in 1950 at the American Psychological Association annual meeting. Guilford, the president of the association, used his presidential address to discuss creativity and encourage more research be focused on it. Prior to this, the field of psychology had been dominated by Behaviorism: the idea that only what could be directly observed should be studied (Locke & Latham, 2019). Since creativity is mostly a thought process, Behaviorism did not have much to say about it. The next 30 years of research focused mostly on cataloging personality traits of creative individuals, and what personality traits lead to greater creativity.

Based on several studies of creative people, common traits include:

- ability to think in an open, and adaptable fashion;
- questioning of norms and assumptions;
- a great need for freedom;
- a commitment to task rather than organization;
- intrinsic motivation;
- spending more time studying problems — which can include asking ‘why’ and changing the frame of reference;
- open, democratic and humorous personality; and

- a dislike of tight control and strict behavioral rules (Albrecht & Albrecht, 1987; Himes, 1987; Kuhn, 1988; Tardif & Sternberg, 1988 as cited by DeNisi & Murphy, 2017).

Creative people generally have a learning mindset, are flexible in their thought processes, and are willing to take risks and push through obstacles. These traits help them generate creative ideas (Zhou, 2003 p. 414).

### ***Creatives at Work***

As it became clear that creativity could provide a competitive advantage to businesses, research on the creative employee accelerated. This research has explored how creative people approach work, the types of jobs they are drawn to, and how they view their careers. The creative person's identity is deeply tied to their work (Rostan, 1998 as cited in Mumford, 2011). Creativity is central to how they see themselves, and they often place great importance on working hard to improve their craft (Rostan, 1998). They have a learning mindset: a need to achieve and to gain expertise, and they may care little about power and affiliation in the office (Mumford, et al., 2002). This audience has a greater need for internal control and role clarity than other employees (Barron, 1969; Pierson, 1983 as cited in Mullin & Sherman, 1993). This is perhaps the strongest theme among this research: the need for autonomy and freedom and dislike of behavioral and procedural rules (Barron, 1969; Hennessey & Amabile, 1988; Pierson, 1983 as cited in Mullin & Sherman, 1993).

While creativity research is plentiful, research on creativity and human resources is relatively scarce (Joo et al., 2013; Mullin & Sherman, 1993). Moreover, even the learnings from the research that has been done are not implemented in many organizations (Mullin & Sherman, 1993).

A widely cited definition of creativity calls it a process of thinking that results in “the production of ideas, products, or procedures that are (a) novel or original and (b) potentially useful to the organization” (Amabile, 1996; Shalley, 1991; Zhou & George, 2001 as cited in Baer et al., 2003, p. 570). The Componential Theory of Creativity, developed by Theresa Amabile in 1983, is one of the most influential theories of creativity. This theory proposes that successful creative performance relies on: 1) domain-relevant skills, 2) creative thinking techniques, and 3) task motivation (Harvard Business Review et al., 2020). ‘Domain-relevant skills’ refers to having knowledge and proper training from a technical aspect; that is,

understanding how to use the tools required for the job. ‘Creative thinking techniques’ refers to the creative professional’s ability to shift perspective, and view things in a variety of ways to find novel solutions. ‘Task motivation’ refers to the fact that creativity is motivated by internal factors rather than external rewards such as money or promotion. This is a pivotal point in considering why traditional performance measures are often inappropriate for creative employees.

**Psychology and motivation.** The traditional performance evaluation is built on the assumption that managers can motivate employees to reach some goal with the promise of a raise, promotion, or some other benefit provided by the employer. In *Managing Creative People* (2008), Gordon Torr explains: “It’s not that creative people are allergic to money. They love it as much as the rest of us do. It’s when money or other rewards, like fame and parking spaces, are linked to the accomplishment of a specific creative task that things go pear-shaped” (p. 62). Research shows that creatives do respond positively to recognition, supportive feedback, and clear expectations of creative output (Eisenberger & Cameron, 1996 as cited in Mumford, 2011). The primary motivation must come from within, though. Incentives and rewards should be approached differently for creatives as they are intrinsically motivated. The most successful creative companies avoid traditional reward systems, and instead they work to foster working environments where creativity can thrive (Mumford, 2011).

**Setting goals.** Research shows that setting goals for oneself at work encourages employees to be more motivated and productive (Locke & Latham, 2019). Goals are “mental representations of desired outcomes” (Austin & Vancouver, 1996 as cited in Harkin, Webb, Chang et. al, 2016, p. 3). The effectiveness of goal setting depends on:

- the clarity and specificity of the goal,
- an appropriate difficulty level,
- the inclusion of the employee in the goal creation process, and
- regularly receiving feedback and monitoring progress (Rahyuda, Syed & Soltani, 2014; Harkin et al., 2016; McEwan et al., 2016; as cited in Wigert & Harter, 2017).

Research has explored the effects of productivity goals and creativity goals on employee performance. Shalley (1991) tested productivity goals (things like generating a certain number of artifacts in a certain amount of time) and creativity goals (tasks that specifically told the employee to take a creative approach). This study also examined the impact of a difficulty metric

or a ‘do-your-best’ metric. Shalley found that employees perform best with “either a do-your-best creativity goal and difficult productivity goal or a difficult creativity goal and difficult productivity goal” (p. 179). Shalley’s findings explored the effects each type of goal had on reaching the other. The findings suggest that employees can have these two different types of goals with no negative impact on their performance.

However, the participants in this research were undergraduate students in an introductory business administration course; thus the participants were not actual employees facing performance evaluations, in addition to not being trained to be in the creative field. This use of non-representative participants is an ongoing problem with the research available; there are a limited number of studies that have been performed on actual designers. Fortunately, at least on the topic of setting goals, “best practices in general goal-setting research closely align with research specific to creativity goals... Set clear and specific goals, ensure goals are appropriately difficult, involve employees in the goal-setting process, monitor progress and provide feedback” (Wigert, 2018, p. 349).

Employees’ level of personal discretion is also a factor in how successful employees are in reaching their goals. This is particularly relevant for our audience given the creative person’s need for autonomy. Goal setting for creative employees must account for the need for autonomy by not prescribing a process to achieving a goal. Goals should also be defined clearly and not changed frequently (Torr, 2008).

A modern framework for goal setting is the OKR: Objective and Key Result. ‘Objective’ refers to what one wants to accomplish; ‘key result’ refers to how one will accomplish it. OKRs became a popular framework among technology companies and gained popularity more broadly when they were implemented at Google (BetterWorks, 2015). Wodtke (2015) describes setting OKRs as well as weekly priorities to ensure she’s moving in the right direction:

Starting every week with a public setting of priorities is powerful. You commit to the team and to each other to make the Objective occur. A Friday celebration of what’s been accomplished is the second bookend of a high-performing team’s week. This commit/celebrate cadence creates a habit of execution. (p. 15)

Once the employee has a clear goal to aim toward, they should monitor their work at different intervals through the process. Research shows that goal setting is more effective when also supported by progress monitoring and feedback (Harkin et al., 2016).

**Monitoring progress.** In Psychology, planning and monitoring behaviors fall into a category called ‘self-regulating processes’ and include actions and behaviors that help an employee be organized, like evaluating and prioritizing tasks for completion. Monitoring refers to “accurately, consistently, and frequently collecting valid information about one’s progress toward a goal (e.g., by using diary methods or by requesting regular peer feedback)” (Toaddy, 2015, p. 524). This behavior prompts the person to compare their current state with a goal state and translate intentions into actions by planning how they will get to the goal state. A study of software designers showed that planning and monitoring behaviors were more common among high performers (Sonnetag, 1998). For those in creative roles, monitoring progress is important due to the nature of the projects they work on where requirements can change mid-stream, and outcomes are not always known in advance. Research on how and what the employee monitors shows varying results.

Monitoring progress can be done through measuring progress to the goal, or progress from the goal. In a review of the impact of monitoring success in reaching a health goal, both forms of monitoring were found to be successful. However, those who were prompted to review progress left to attain rather than progress made so far engaged in monitoring behaviors more frequently (Harkin et al., 2016). Monitoring may occur passively or actively. Passive monitoring requires no deliberate effort to seek out information on progress; active monitoring requires gathering information about progress. Harkin et al. (2016) found that neither form impacted goal attainment, though those who were prompted to monitor did so more frequently. Sharing progress publicly was found to have larger impact on goal attainment than when progress was kept private.

In order to monitor progress, the data collected from the processes of goal setting and monitoring progress needs to be visually presented and organized. This visualization of growth is valuable for the employee (to determine how much progress they have made and whether it is in the right direction), for the manager (to make sure the employee is on track and aligning with organizational goals), and for leadership (to make hiring and compensation decisions).

Given that designers are professionally focused on visual communication, it is appropriate that designers should present their own growth in a visually compelling format. Garvin (2020) advises to tell a story with this data and to create artifacts that show the thought processes and decision making that went into each step of the project. Design roles do center

around developing some form of output (e.g. a website, brochure, blueprints), but the employee's true value is in their ability to solve problems creatively, not merely churn out deliverables. Growth tracking should provide a way to present the work, the thinking behind it, and how problems were addressed.

**Feedback.** Feedback on performance is an important element in supporting the employee in reaching their goals. Feedback should be provided frequently and at established stages in the project. This provides encouragement and promotes creativity-boosting behaviors such as exploring new ideas or feeling that there is safety to fail (Mumford, 2011). Frequent feedback is also necessary because immediate feedback is more effective than delayed feedback (Dihoff, Brosvic, Epstein, & Cook, 2004; Opitz, Ferdinand, & Mecklinger, 2011 as cited in Harkin et al., 2016). Providing the right type of feedback for a creative person's performance is key.

Feedback is also most successful when it is direct, but supportive (Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta, & Kramer, 2004; West, 1990) regarding technical aspects of the work (Mumford & Hunter, 2005), and when it affirms positive work behaviors (Cardinal, 2001 as cited in Mumford, 2011). When providing feedback on progress towards a developmental or learning goal, such feedback should be more informational than evaluative (Shalley, 1995).

Feedback should also be collected from multiple sources, as this increases the reliability of the comments (Mullin & Sherman, 1993, p. 432). The 360-review, or multi-source feedback process has become widely used (London & Smither, 1995) and popular among creative companies (3D Group, 2009 as cited in Mumford, 2011). The 360-review process

calls for ratings of a manager from the key constituencies representing the full circle of relevant viewpoints — subordinates, peers, supervisors (possibly including higher-level supervisors along with the direct supervisor), customers and suppliers who may be internal or external to the organization, and self-ratings. (Dunnette, 1993; Tornow, 1993 as cited in London & Smither, 1995, p. 804)

However, despite the fact that the feedback of others is essential, the process of self-assessment is most important for creative employees (Mullin & Sherman, 1993). The most valuable sort of self-assessment involves reflection.

**Reflection.** The quality of the content submitted in the evaluation is impacted by the quality of the employee's reflection. The purpose of reflection is to further develop learnings and

improve professional practice. Reflection can lead to personal transformation (Black & Plowright, 2010).

The process of reflection is often researched in the context of education and presented in the form of a portfolio. A portfolio can be used as a structure for “learning activities, a strategy of knowledge acquisition and organization, and as a tool for autonomous self-assessment” (Habib & Wittek, 2007, p. 269). The portfolio is often used in higher-education as an alternative to traditional testing and measuring efforts (Habib & Wittek, 2007).

The research from the field of portfolio assessment is clear that there are many benefits to a reflective practice, including positive motivation, feelings of ownership, responsibility, critical analysis skills, and overall depth of understanding (Habib & Wittek, 2007).

The portfolio can be used to show learning has occurred, and in other instances the portfolio is used to show competency (as in an interview) (Habib & Wittek, 2007). The portfolio itself can be graphic or written — the research on reflection through portfolio covers studies with various uses of the term ‘portfolio.’

Portfolios are not limited to the creative profession. Research has shown that the benefits of reflection through portfolios can be positive even in traditionally quantitative fields such as like nursing or pharmacy. In one study, those in the pharmacy field were encouraged to reflect by writing experiences down in a journal which they referred to as a ‘learning log’ and later, in a portfolio. The study shows the benefit of reflective writing to “facilitate dialogue-with-self through the medium of a written portfolio” (Black & Plowright, 2010, p. 256). Even though the participants had concerns about their own writing abilities, they found the exercise valuable to “engage in a deeper learning process that was possible otherwise” (Black & Plowright, 2010, p. 254).

‘Portfolio thinking’ was mentioned as a way to describe the deliberate habit of on-going self-documentation. In these research scenarios, participants expect to be assessed on the portfolio and gathered assets daily. The authors point out that its worth exploring whether this leads to excessive internalization and ‘unreasonable demands of self-documentation’. They also wonder if over-documentation “could result in increased levels of surveillance” (Habib & Wittek, 2007, p. 280).

### **Evaluation and measuring performance.**

**Ranking scales.** Research into performance evaluation began with studying methods for ranking employees (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). It was acknowledged from nearly the beginning of the research that ranking scales were vulnerable to several errors such as subjectivity and inaccuracy. By 1980, the goal of finding the perfect ranking scale was abandoned (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017).

Expecting an objective rating from a subjective human is one of the central problem of the performance evaluation:

Researchers have demonstrated that supervisors make mistakes (for example, halo errors, recency effects, central tendency: see Milkovich and Newman (2002) for a full list of rating errors), are uncomfortable about providing negative feedback (for example see Chen et al., 2007), often put off doing appraisals (Bratton and Gold, 1999), or apply their own set of internal values about performance when assessing their employees (Murphy and Cleveland, 1995) (Brown, Hyatt, & Benson 2010, p. 378).

There are several aspects of creative work that makes measuring creative performance particularly difficult. To begin, creative work is ambiguous and unpredictable. Creative problems are often ill-defined, “ambiguous, unstructured, have missing information, [and can] be solved in multiple ways, rather than one correct way” (Wigert, 2018, p. 345).

Directions such as ‘Give examples of how you exceeded the requirements of a creative brief’ are hard to quantify. If the creative brief was locked down at an early stage by the client, it would be hard for a designer to do anything other than focus instead on delivering their work on time and to a high quality (Creative Bloq Staff, 2010, para. 5). Additionally, ratings of technical proficiency do not account for innovation:

Asking an artist to rate their software skills from one to 10 is no indication of how creative they are. Knowing what every panel, button and drop-down menu does in Photoshop doesn't make for a great artist or designer (Creative Bloq Staff, 2010, para. 7)

Creativity requires experimentation, thus “Sutton (2001) suggests that organizations should reward creative activity regardless of the outcome, in order to promote safe environments for experimentation with an open recognition that not all new ideas are good ones. The only activity that should be punished or managed out of the organization is inactivity” (Handbook of Org Creativity, p. 599).



At Twitter Design & Research, Mike Davidson describes the strategy behind their evaluation: “reward behavior over outcomes, emphasize the importance of teamwork and execution, and keep everything within each employee’s control” (2016, para. 16). This approach crystallized into four pillars:

1. Getting things done. Does the designer do what they promise to?
2. Creating strong relationships. Does the designer work well with their team and cross-functionally?
3. Improving the team. Does the designer branch out and help others at the team and company grow?
4. Technical skills, empathy, and vision. Does the designer show talent and skill at their role?

Davidson discusses further how to use these pillars to evaluate how an employee is performing:

This is where some people are going to get uncomfortable. The answer is by soliciting opinions from peers, managers, and anyone else who works with the person being evaluated. Isn’t that subjective though? Yes, yes it is! It’s subjective, but clearly specified and full of agency. You may disagree with a person’s assessment of you (which is why multiple people give feedback), but you should never feel like you either don’t know what’s expected of you or that you aren’t in control of the associated behaviors.

(Davidson, 2016, para. 22).

At a similarly large technology company, Google focuses on evaluating the employee’s thinking, behavior and impact: “Google asks managers to measure employee performance beyond outcomes — they want to look at how the employee achieved those outcomes. They look at the employee’s ability to demonstrate company values, problem solve, execute with little guidance, and make himself or herself heard in an increasingly large organization” (Linkedin Learning, n.d., para. 15).

## **Conclusion**

Most performance evaluation practices in place today are not conducive to encouraging creative employees (Hovecar, 1981; Keil, 1985 as cited in Mullin & Sherman, 1993). Today’s jobs are dramatically different than they were when the performance evaluation came into popularity, due to globalization, advances in technology, and an increasing focus on providing

digital rather than concrete products. To address this problem, this research study explores what designer-centered performance management might look like when the unique needs of this audience and their managers are considered.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Human-Centered Approach**

This research was designed using the Human-Centered Design (HCD) method. The mindset behind this approach is based on the idea that “people who face those problems every day are the ones who hold the key to their answer” (IDEO.org, 2015, p. 9). This method is characterized by its “obsessive focus on understanding the perspective of the person who experiences a problem, their needs, and whether the solution that has been designed for them is truly meeting their needs effectively or not” (DC Design, 2017, para. 4).

HCD requires a shift in perspective from prioritizing business goals to better serving the customer, as a way to ultimately drive engagement, sales, and growth (Thomsen, 2015). HCD puts the user at the center throughout the process and starts with building empathy for that person (IDEO.org, 2015).

HCD is executed in three, high-level phases: an inspiration phase, an ideation phase, and an implementation phase (IDEO.org, 2015). The inspiration phase is a period of discovery characterized by divergent thinking. During this phase, the researcher works through divergent and then convergent thinking; they observe the user, gather insights, and explore the problem space to reach a clear understanding of the topic. Many ideas and hypotheses are generated in this phase. The second phase, ideation, includes convergent thinking to gain greater focus and scope the problem area. During this phase, the researcher focuses on a particular solution and begins making something to test with users, typically a prototype. The final phase, implementation, has the researcher converging further as they test the prototype with users and get their feedback. My research activities were organized by these three phases.

### **Inspiration Phase: Discovery through interviews**

#### ***Background, Goals, and Questions***

The inspiration phase aims to learn about the users’ past experiences and perspectives. HCD principles hold that the best way to do this is by talking directly to the audience through interviews (IDEO.org, 2015). In the field of user research, interviews are a common tool to gain a better understanding of the users, their goals and the barriers that get in the way. The researcher’s main role is to guide the interview with a set of prepared, open-ended questions and to listen closely to the participant.

The sessions provided a sense of the landscape of available tools and approaches to performance management in use today, along with an opportunity to analyze how designers and design managers are currently completing tasks around performance management. Insights from the literature review were used to understand the current journey through the performance management process by capturing what users are thinking, feeling, and doing at different stages, as well as to identify behavioral archetypes.

The goals of this research were to:

- Gain a clearer understanding of the designer and design manager's perspectives and hear real experiences, good and bad.
- Investigate how some designers and managers have developed workarounds to get more out of the performance management process.
- Discuss the goal formats in use, such as OKRs or SMART goals, and the use of metrics.
- Learn about the emotional impact of goal setting, reflecting on progress, and performance evaluation.

The research questions that guided this study are:

- What characterizes growth or progress for designers? For their managers?
- What part do emotions and self-esteem play in setting goals, reflecting on progress, and being evaluated?
- Are there any designer/manager needs that performance management is not currently meeting?
- What are appropriate metrics for goals?
- How does adding visual support of work done impact feelings about performance management?
- Do any themes around past experiences and current practices emerge?
- How are designers impacted by the process of learning through reflection, self-evaluation, and creating a portfolio?
- How might we foster the creative employee's need for greater control and autonomy?

### ***Participants***

Pulling from my professional network, I conducted interviews with nine participants: five designers and four design managers. As I relied on volunteers to participate, this sample is a

convenience sample rather than a true random sampling of the larger population. All participants were current employees in the design field working full time at a company. I specifically scouted those whom I knew had multiple years of experience in the field and therefore had more than one experience filling out a performance evaluation. I interviewed visual designers, user experience (UX) designers, and one service designer. Participants' years of experience ranged from four years to more than 20 years. I spoke to participants working in companies of different sizes: small (hundreds of employees), medium (thousands of employees) and large (tens of thousands of employees).

I aimed to speak with those in design execution roles with titles such as graphic designer, visual designer, user experience (UX) designer, or illustrator. These are the users who have traditionally been least involved in the conversation about what a performance management solution should look like. In the book *Creative Culture* (2020), Justin Dauer explains: "Many tools selected at the upper echelons of business get implemented without a collaborative dialogue with the very people who will use them" (p. 114).

I also spoke with managers who are responsible for completing evaluations of those in design positions. Many in this role have design backgrounds themselves which informed their responses. Design managers have also traditionally not been included in many decisions about performance management tools.

Table 1

*Discovery Interviews: Participants' role, field, years of experience, and size of company where they currently work*

ID	User Role	Background or Primary Field	Years of Experience	Company Size (Number of employees)
P1	Designer	Graphic/Visual Design	4–6 years	Medium (1,000s)
P2	Designer	Graphic/Visual Design	7–10 years	Small (100s)
P3	Design Manager	Graphic/Visual Design	4–6 years	Small (100s)
P4	Design Manager	Graphic/Visual Design	11–19 years	Small (100s)
P5	Designer	UX Design	7–10 years	Large (10,000s)
P6	Designer	UX Design	11–19 years	Small (100s)
P7	Designer, Design Manager	Service Design	11–19 years	Small (100s)
P8	Design Manager	UX Design	20+ years	Large (10,000s)
P9	Designer	Graphic/Visual Design	11–19 years	Small (100s)

### ***Interview Structure***

Participants signed consent forms prior to the interviews. I prepared an interview script with a base set of questions that was added to or customized based on what I knew about the participant and on issues that emerged during the interview. The interview script was designed to prompt participants to give responses that through analysis and synthesis, would provide answers to my research questions. Interviews lasted up to an hour and were held on Zoom. The interviews explored participants' past experiences with performance management, the tools they used, and the different stages of the evaluation process: goal planning, monitoring progress, receiving feedback, reflecting, and completing the formal evaluation. This allowed me to understand common tasks, needs, complaints, and perspectives at different times in the cycle. Additional themes emerged like the importance of peers, the interconnectedness of a designer's projects and goals, and the importance of tracking and building soft skills. At the end of the interview, I walked the participant through a conceptual flow of a 'reflection' process based on my preliminary ideas (see Appendix A: Initial Sketches). After showing the conceptual flow, I asked how participants thought it was more or less effective than what was currently in place at their company.

### ***Analysis and Synthesis Process***

Because my own background as a designer could affect interpretation of my results, I made ongoing efforts to check every insight to make sure it was based on a direct quote from a participant. I analyzed data by stage of the journey and by user role. Exploring stages of the journey revealed how people experience performance management over time. I also used the interviews to define behavioral archetypes that explored common perspectives, attitudes, behaviors, and needs.

I organized the interview notes into sections based on the interview script, then tagged each observation with a code. Coding is a research analysis process that "involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often based in the actual language of the participant (called an 'in vivo' term)" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pg. 194). The coding system developed as I analyzed the interview data. To begin developing the coding system, I returned to my research questions and created a code that would track insights related to each

interview question. These are known as ‘pre-determined codes.’ I also brainstormed things I had seen in the interviews that I knew I wanted to dive into more deeply, such as the role of peers, or the importance of soft skills. These are known as ‘emerging codes.’ In all, there were 30 codes that were tracked. These codes were grouped into themes, and relationships between themes were noted in order to build a hierarchy. Once observations from each interview were coded, I reviewed them to look for patterns.

I began by laying out the observations by stage of the journey. This led to a further developed understanding and definition of each stage. Observations were organized into touchpoints, thoughts, feelings, or actions. Each cell of the table was analyzed for patterns (for example, what were designers thinking during the goal setting stage). Designer interview notes were kept separate from design manager notes as these roles perform different tasks throughout the process.

This process helped me consolidate findings, and evaluating patterns led to insights. These insights helped inform the subsequent design of the tool.

Different insights emerged when looking for patterns in behaviors, goals, motivations, perspectives, or unmet needs. In evaluating the data in this way, some themes began emerging: feelings about structure, honesty in self-reflection, approach to career progress, motivation, relationship to manager, and past experiences with performance management. These factors eventually became the differentiators between behavioral archetypes.

User research involves creating user segments to facilitate the design for a range of user needs rather than for the faceless majority. These user segments do not represent the average user and are not the same as representing market segments (Goodwin, 2009). They are meant to “represent the range of needs and behaviors exhibited by most of your audience” (Goodwin, 2009, p. 238). These help teams understand how to design for different users, build empathy for users, and decide how to prioritize features.

For this study, I created behavioral archetypes which are one way to represent what has been learned about an audience. An archetype focuses on behavior and motivation over demographics: “They dive deeper into the patterns a person operates within as well as the underlying thoughts that drive behaviour” (Hewitson, 2020, para. 15). An archetype is more like an idea than it is a specific person. Behavioral archetypes “focus on the journey a group of individuals takes with a product/service and what they think about it” (Hewitson, 2020, para. 9).

A single person can “fall within more than one archetype and this is what makes up your personality” (Hewitson, 2020, para. 5).

Four behavioral archetypes emerged when comparing what the participant believed to be the value of performance management. Because these four groups viewed the purpose and value of performance evaluation differently, their behavior and response to the evaluation process was different. All nine participants agreed that the performance management process was important, but they differed in their feelings and actions in response to it. These differences pointed to deeper personal values and beliefs, which eventually became the basis for the behavioral archetypes discussed in Chapter 4.

### ***Outcomes of Inspiration Phase***

Analysis and synthesis of the interview responses from the inspiration phase provided a solid understanding of the audience, the problem, and preliminary feedback on low fidelity wireframes. These findings are represented through a user journey (see Appendix B: User Journey) and a set of four behavioral archetypes (see Appendices C–F). I had validated some of my early hypotheses and could pivot to generating ideas and choosing an area of focus.

### **Ideation Phase: Define, Design, and Develop**

#### ***Background and Goals***

The second phase of HCD involves generating ideas for a design, pursuing an area of focus, and creating a prototype to test. The ideation phase pivots from collecting facts to prioritizing and narrowing them down. Throughout this phase, the designer is defining the problem further, designing solutions, and eventually developing a tool to test hypotheses and assumptions. This process is valuable because the designer can apply what was learned in the inspiration phase to produce a data-driven design.

Based on my interviews in the discovery phase, I developed user stories to simplify my understanding of what the tool needed to do. This process helped me consolidate what I knew about the user and their needs to reach their larger goal. These user stories informed a ‘How Might We...’ exercise to reframe problems into exploratory statements. At this point I chose an area of focus and began design activities of creating a content model, a user flow, and finally a prototype for testing.

#### ***User Stories***



User stories are a tool from Agile project management methodology. They are a formula for pairing specific user needs with an end goal. The benefit of the user story is that it is a simple, short formula that helps quickly direct work. The framework for a user story is: “As a (some type of user), I need to (complete some task) so that I can (reach some goal).” A user story documents the user’s goal outside of the restrictions of the current state. A good user story does not pre-suppose a solution, stays high level, and does not refer to specific features (Cohn, n.d.).

To develop user stories, I first looked at each behavioral archetype in each phase of the journey and documented their unique circumstances. I used the following sentence starters to make the stories succinct and meaningful, thinking about how each behavioral archetype would answer:

- “I want....”
- “I need....”
- “I’m trying to...”
- “I have to....”

Using this phrasing made it easier to generate user stories. This exploration took the form of a table with stages of the journey in each column and behavioral archetypes in rows. This process provided a deeper understanding of the user’s motivation and behavior by ensuring needs were linked to the correct user goals.

### ***‘How Might We...’***

‘How might we...’ (HMW) statements are a design thinking activity used to explore design opportunities before jumping to a solution. Using insights from research, the activity prompts you to reframe problems as statements starting with ‘how might we...’ This exercise is usually done collaboratively with a group, and many HMW statements will be generated before some are selected for actual exploration (Keller, 2019). This method prompts you to apply what you have learned from research and generate a wide range of ideas before narrowing them down. I brainstormed statements of ‘how might we...’ solve the different problems users discussed. From there, I chose a few statements to pursue further.

### ***Creating a Content Model***

A content model is a visualization of data entities or content that will exist in a system to support user tasks and needs. The diagram typically shows relationships between pieces of

content, attributes, and metadata for different data entities. A content model is a way to start planning how to build or design a system from a content-first perspective (Lovinger, 2012). The process of creating the content model benefited this research study in three important ways: identifying the different types of data needed, a consideration of language and terms, and an examination of the underlying message and question posed by the performance evaluation. Using the outcomes from HMW activity, the user interviews, and answers to research questions, I developed the model which became the backbone of the prototype (see Appendix G: Content Model).

### ***Creating a User Flow***

A user flow is a diagram that starts to define how the interface will support the user in completing some task. The process shows how basic requirements will be fulfilled, how the flow will reflect the user's natural thought process or mental model, and the interaction design elements needed on each page (see Appendix H: User Flow).

### ***Designing a Prototype***

A prototype is an early version of the final product. It is an interactive collection of screens where the user can complete a small number of tasks. The purpose of a prototype is to show an overall idea of how a feature or function might work even though it is still unfinished. I used Framer, an interactive prototyping tool, to create the prototype (see Appendix I: Prototype).

### ***Outcomes of Ideation Phase***

With an idea for what the tool should do overall, I focused on one area to explore. Findings from discovery interviews were carried through to implementation of the prototype by tracking relevant user stories and HMW statements. Then a prototype was created in preparation for usability testing.

## **Implementation Phase: Usability testing**

### ***Background, Goals, and Research Questions***

Usability testing demonstrates how usable a tool is by measuring it against best practices and observing user responses. In this instance, the testing showed where the design aligned with the participant's mental model of professional goals, performance management and displaying progress.

The research questions that guided this study are:

- What do users understand the purpose of 'performing a reflection' to be?

- How well does this goal-setting model allow for the flexibility needed due to business changes out of a designer's control?
- How well does this model show and track growth in soft skills?

**Reflection**

- What order do designers want to reflect in?
  - Is the order the same for everyone?
- Do designers feel the prototype collects the right information and asks the right questions?

**Portfolio**

- How does this experience compare with the process of portfolio development? Are those similarities good or bad?
- How well do these features allow the designer to reflect the message they want to convey?

**Participants**

Leveraging my professional network, I tested the prototype with six new participants (that is, participants who were not interviewed during the inspiration phase). The participants included three designers and three design managers. They had a range of experience from three years to over 20 years. Using new participants ensured participants were not primed before testing the prototype, and also provided additional data points that further validated my previous findings.

Table 2

*Usability Testing: Participants' role, field, years of experience, and size of company where they currently work*

ID	User Role	Background or Primary Field	Years of Experience	Company Size (Number of Employees)
P10	Designer	UX Design	20+	Large (10,000s)
P11	Designer	Service Design	0–3	Small (100s)
P12	Design Manager	Graphic/Visual Design	20+	Large (10,000s)
P13	Design Manager	Graphic/Visual Design	20+	Medium (1,000s)
P14	Design Manager	UX Design	20+	Large (10,000s)
P15	Designer	UX Design	7–10	Large (10,000s)

***Session Structure***

Participants signed consent forms prior to being interviewed. Sessions were held over Zoom and lasted an hour. The participant was first asked some introductory questions, then tested the prototype and answered follow-up questions. Before seeing the prototype, participants were given a scenario to work from: they were asked to pretend they work at a company as a visual designer named Kevin O'Donnell. They have just received an email letting them know it's time to do their 2021 year-end wrap-up. They were then asked to use the prototype to 'perform a reflection' on their professional growth and achievements over the last three months of the year.

***Outcomes of Implementation Phase***

In the HCD process, a tested and well-researched solution is presented at the end of the implementation phase, with the benefit of a cycle of iteration. Results from the HCD process are shared in the following three chapters.

## **Chapter 4: Inspiration Phase: Discovery interview results**

The following three chapters describe the results of this research study, organized by the phases of the HCD method: inspiration, ideation, and implementation. This chapter contains results from discovery interviews examining the user's journey, and relevant themes are discussed within each of the five stages. Four behavioral archetypes are defined, along with a broader spectrum on which to understand the thinking and behavior patterns of the designers in this study. Finally, feedback on initial concepts is discussed.

### **General Experiences and Complaints with Current Systems**

Participants' experiences with performance management were largely determined by the size of the company where they worked. Large companies (with tens of thousands of employees) had a structured and fully built-out approach. Large companies with a stronger design focus had processes that suited designers better. These large companies used a custom portal or a popular project management solution like Workday.

Medium sized companies (with thousands of employees) also provided a structured approach with support and used a custom portal or a big technology solution. These more established systems have structured areas of the process along with less structured areas; Human Resources systems have provided different levels of structure at different times in the cycle. For example, quarterly check-ins with the manager were less structured, while annual reviews were strongly formulaic.

Small companies (those with hundreds of employees or less) ranged from structured approaches to having almost no approach. Small companies with small design teams used the evaluation to track more traditional metrics. This approach made designers feel the evaluation was irrelevant. Some of these small companies use spreadsheets to track performance, Word documents, or other lightweight internal solutions.

One might think, based on the traditional belief that designers hate structure, that excessive structure was their most common complaint about performance management. It is true that some designers detest structure and process and are fundamentally at odds with the administrative nature of the performance management process. However, the interviews showed that designers do recognize the need for process and will note its absence when there is a complete lack of it. Other designers are not against the idea of structure but dislike the limitations of the *current* structure they are under. Most felt the current structure did not meet

their needs in some way; others lamented the complete lack of structure. Several participants discussed the absence of positive past experiences, attentive managers, or established evaluation processes. In the absence of structure some designers will impose their own, knowing that without structure they may not progress in the field:

“I realized this is my skill set and I’m going to use it to make sure I succeed because if not, I’m going to *not* succeed on his watch, because he doesn't realize that he needs to set me up for success as my manager” (P1).

For the designers I interviewed, there was no one primary complaint across all of participants. Because I interviewed people from small, medium and large companies, their experiences and complaints varied. However, there were two primary complaints among design managers, regardless of the company size where they worked: the time investment of evaluations and the challenge of managing a unique set of individuals. Design managers wanted to be able to customize any broader company-imposed format to make it more relevant for their team. They described the challenge of trying to find a management approach that works for everyone. One-size-fits-all has often been the approach of performance evaluations, but it does not work for this audience: “Everyone is coming in with a different background and a different set of skills” (P8). The evaluation should be a tool to help design managers coach their direct reports through guidance and feedback, but they commented that the evaluation covered the wrong things:

“It’s different to evaluate designers than in other fields because we have so many projects and we’re creating work as opposed to talking to the client, so that’s less helpful to be rated on. It would be more helpful to look over designs... it would be great to review project work rather than company values — that would be helpful for the designers to continue to improve and enjoy their work” (P3).

A common theme among design manager and designer experiences is that they do not have a clear understanding of what happens to the data submitted from the performance evaluation. Both designers and design managers referred to gaps in their knowledge and understanding of the overall evaluation process. Participants mentioned not knowing why HR wants things done a certain way. As a result, participants seemed to focus on simply getting the task done even though it did not make a lot of sense to them. Participants reported a lack of clear communication around what the evaluation is and why they should do it. Some also mentioned a

lack of transparency in evaluation criteria, leaving them to wonder what standards they are being evaluated against and how they can improve or advance.

### **Examining the Journey**

Data from the discovery phase was organized into user journeys for analysis. A user journey map is a tool used in UX design. It typically shows a customer's experience while using a service to reach a goal, like checking out a library book or ordering at a restaurant. These journeys are usually linear, with a distinct start and end point where the user completes some transaction. However, findings from these discovery interviews are represented in a cyclical journey map for two reasons. The first is that modern performance management aims to encourage and foster employee growth, and growth is a cyclical process rather than a linear journey.

It is important to frame this journey in terms of growth rather than achievement as this view is more in line with intrinsic motivation. An extrinsic view might look at the evaluation itself as the end of the journey because the primary focus would be some external reward. But when external rewards are secondary, it is more important to look at the evaluation process as a cycle rather than a linear journey.

Using the method described in Chapter 3, based on the analysis and synthesis of participant responses the performance management journey includes five stages: 1) setting a direction, 2) monitoring progress, 3) getting and implementing feedback, 4) reflecting, and 5) evaluation. The stages of the journey are not discreet; the order of the stages is general, not specific. During a particular cycle, a person could receive feedback at any point, could monitor their progress at any point, and could reflect at any point. Additionally, there are likely several iterations of mini-cycles within one larger, year-long cycle (see Appendix B: Journey Map).

#### ***Stage 1: Setting a direction***

The first step in the user journey is to set a direction. About once a year, the designer is tasked with defining a handful of goals to reach over an agreed-upon timeframe. The designer is typically left to their own devices to come up with these goals, though the process is often done right after an evaluation has just occurred, so employees have their recent feedback in mind. Once they have a rough draft of their goals, designers work with their managers to refine and finalize them.

Companies have varying requirements around the number and format of employee goals; participants mentioned Objective and Key Results (OKR and SMART goals as examples. Some companies required employees to use these formats, while others simply encouraged them. Required documentation of these goals ranges from formal to informal depending on company size. Large companies usually have robust systems to document and track goals, while small companies may have informal solutions like spreadsheets, or even no system at all.

During this stage, design managers often help facilitate conversations with employees around breaking down goals into milestones and actions, and how to turn an idea into an actionable plan based on what the employee is looking to do. Design managers also help their reports think about ways to quantify the goal: “we try to really make the key results piece of it very, like measurable or tangible, which can be hard sometimes... Designers aren't always metric minded” (P8).

Design managers commented on ways the evaluation makes their job harder in this stage, specifically when there are no formalized company goals to use as a foundation for crafting employee goals. Formalized company goals help employees understand the mission of the organization, the theme of the year (if it exists), and understand how they can contribute. One design manager commented that their company’s performance evaluation could be more helpful if it covered the employee’s strengths and career aspirations. The fact that it did not made goal setting more difficult.

Participants were asked how they went about choosing and setting goals. In response, they spoke about the requirements of a goal and shared questions they might ask themselves to probe for ideas, but almost none of them spoke about the process in a clear or organized way. Many participants mentioned feeling overwhelmed by the process and under pressure due to a submission deadline.

**Theme: Most designers do not have a clear, defined, reliable process for developing goals.** This lack of process may add to the pressure they feel during this stage. After synthesizing their responses, it became clear that for the majority of participants the thought process could be organized into three different areas: 1) looking inward 2) looking outward and 3) applying requirements.

Looking inward, participants spoke about exploring what they can already do and where they might improve. They generated ideas of where they might improve by assessing their



current skills and situation, identifying an ideal or desired outcome, and considering their own interests. The participants described considering what is attainable, thinking through the appropriate scope of a goal. In this process of self-assessment, they spend time considering what they want, whether it is a promotion, a raise, a new job, or a new skill. They also look to where their interests lie, knowing they need to choose a goal that they are passionate about in order to maintain motivation and enthusiasm; they are inspired by personal interests and values.

Looking outward, participants described external factors that impact what goals they set. Designers might consider where they can contribute on their design team or grow design's impact on their product team. They may notice something missing in their local design community which sparks them to think of a way they could contribute. For example, this may be by starting a community of practice, or by building a skill that is missing on their team. Other external considerations were company goals: those who valued a structured performance management approach mentioned the importance of company goals and a feeling of relief when joining a company that provided that direction.

When applying requirements, participants said the goal needed to be something "tangible," or easily measurable. Metrics were a common topic in the interviews and while participants were not particularly fond of them, they seemed to accept them as a necessary part of goal setting rather than questioning their purpose. As one participant verbalized, the purpose of a metric is to prove that the employee reached some goal they set out to achieve. This participant acknowledged that some employees are more enthusiastic about metrics than others; for some employees, metrics are a guide to tell how they are doing, but for other employees the process of identifying them is less important and more of a chore.

One participant had a clear formula for generating professional goals. They described the process as a 'three-legged stool': 1) client delivery (doing an excellent job, creating quality deliverables) 2) people management (leading a community of practice or helping teammates succeed) and 3) business development (creating white papers or writing proposals). The participant commented that this formula can provide a well-rounded sense of where you could be going. Also, it is not specific to a particular project, which they considered a benefit.

**Theme: Metrics are difficult to develop and often misused.** A metric, typically quantitative, is a standard used to determine whether a goal has been achieved. Metrics are an area where the fuzziness of the creative field clashes with the values of the business world, and

they are a recognized frustration among this audience. Some example metrics that participants mentioned were measuring the number of tutorials watched, measuring the number of new types of people they can draw, tracking analytics on a form before and after they re-designed it, tracking engagement analytics year over year, or the number of design awards won, or the amount of new work they brought to the company.

However, many of these traditional metrics for designers are not data points that prove how well a designer achieved a goal. As one participant put it, “there are some traditional metrics, but they aren’t even real metrics” (P4). For example, project goals may have clear success metrics to point to (like increasing web traffic by some percent) but these metrics do not reflect the designer’s personal contribution or growth. Metrics like these are usually arbitrary, easily warped, misunderstood, or corrupted, and may promote burnout rather than growth. One participant spoke about metrics as a means to an end: “fulfilling a metric may not even make me better at my job, but it's just something to do because my boss doesn’t know what I do every day and this will look like I’m making progress” (P6). One participant pointed out that the primary metrics they work toward every day are not their own, but the project’s success metrics, which are pre-determined by the client or a project manager. Because project goals are determined by someone else, designers may feel that setting the goal is out of their hands: “those that you can actually put tangible data points to... it's kind of rare to say, ‘I will get this many projects done this year’ because it's not really up to me” (P5).

While goal metrics are used to show whether the goal has been reached, performance metrics are used to determine how well the employee is performing. Participants felt that performance metrics are difficult to define because designers are evaluated on more factors than people in other fields: “I think design is unique that we are asked to do a lot and be an expert in a lot of different ways on the team and then have soft skills on top of it” (P8).

**Theme: Designers need goals to be flexible to account for the ambiguities and unknowns of project work.** Any number of things can interfere with the plan a designer sets out with: “you may have started the year thinking you're going to work on a certain project or a certain set of whatever and then you know, something happens and you change things up or your manager changes” (P1). Participants generally understood that reaching their goal is not just up to them in that they may need help from others: “it feels like I should have made more progress towards [the goal], but it doesn’t all depend on me... it’s not all on my shoulders” (P5). This

participant also described that the company's goal set-up process prompted the user to document if they would need help from anyone to reach that goal. I would hypothesize that this framing has helped them think about these dependencies long-term, and would be a good feature for future tools.

### ***Stage 2: Monitoring progress***

Monitoring progress is the mental process of comparing what has been achieved so far against a desired end state. This process is important so that designers continuously take the steps necessary to achieve their goals. This could be by changing directions if necessary or by increasing efforts if not enough progress has been made. However, the majority of those interviewed did not do a lot of active monitoring of their progress.

I also noted that a lot of activity happens in the previous stage to set a direction, but then goal documentation is largely ignored. Designers are not thinking much about monitoring or documenting progress until they must. This may be because they do not see the value in monitoring and documentation, they do not have time, it is not communicated as a requirement, or they are not reminded to. In more robust systems for performance evaluation, participants had the ability to go into a program and update the status of a goal or leave comments on progress. Regardless of the system used, participants mentioned almost no triggers that prompted them to perform this task. A project being cancelled could be a trigger for a designer to review their progress, since their goal plan would need adjustment, but it is not generally a requirement to do so. When designers do check in on their progress, it may be before a less formal semiannual or quarterly evaluation.

Designers mostly rely on their managers to track their progress through one-on-one conversations. These conversations may or may not be documented and are rarely reflected back to the participant. Nonetheless, the designer may consider the one-on-one with the manager to be sufficient for tracking their progress. Based on quotes like the following, there seems to be a sense of 'if I were off track my manager would tell me':

"I try to like check-in with my manager on a regular basis and say, Hey... you know, am I doing okay? But he never has any meaningful feedback. Just keep doing what you're doing. Just keep doing what you're doing" (P6).

**Theme: Participants judge themselves negatively for not being better at documentation.** In both stages that require documentation (stage 2: monitoring progress and

stage 4: reflection), participants described feeling like they *should* have done a better job of cataloging their work along the way. They also may feel like they *should* have made more progress toward their goals. Motivation to update progress may be low if the designer was not motivated during the goal-setting stage or thought they had not made much progress on their goals. Reviewing long-term goals may feel daunting and can dampen the motivation to work towards them.

### ***Stage 3: Getting and implementing feedback***

All designer participants reported that they periodically receive feedback from their manager on their performance. However, in all stages other than the final evaluation, designers only receive feedback verbally. This feedback typically comes through a weekly or biweekly one-on-one meeting and may focus primarily on project work rather than progress toward a goal. Organizations usually do not over-engineer this portion of the process and leave it up to individual managers to create the structure for ongoing conversations with employees. During these meetings, design managers said they were focused on communicating feedback in a positive light, focusing on the opportunity within the feedback, and conveying that they are genuinely there to help the designer grow. Design managers described the importance of giving clear feedback throughout the process so that any quarterly or semiannual review feedback does not come as a surprise.

The quarterly or semiannual review processes are similar to a performance evaluation but with less formality and minimal HR oversight. This is an opportunity for designers to reflect on a shorter amount of time and purposefully discuss goal progress with their manager.

All participants felt that feedback was an important part of their growth, helping them know how they can improve their craft and reach their goals. When asked the question “what would you lose if you did not participate in the performance management process at all?” one participant responded that “the feedback is important. I mean, the process might be shitty but I think at the end of the day, some feedback is needed” (P9).

Participants were not always satisfied with the feedback provided by their managers, often because it was not actionable. In these situations, they noted the absence of close attention to their work:

“[Previously when I was] working under an Executive Creative Director... sometimes they can be really like, persnickety about everything. And back then I kind of resented it.

But now it's like, I wish that somebody could also still take a really close look at my work” (P2).

**Theme: Peers play an important role in the growth and development of designers.**

The role and value of peers came up more frequently in the interviews than expected — nearly as frequently as the role of the manager. Interviews pointed to the fact that peers and coworkers helped designers to gain a clearer picture of themselves; participants noted how helpful peer feedback was in reaching a better understanding of their own skill level, their unique value, and where they could improve. Feedback was the most direct way designers gathered these insights, but seeing peers’ work also contributed to their understanding of their own skill level.

Additionally, peers provided the power and benefit of community: sharing work provided inspiration, a huge value to some designers. Thus, peer feedback helped designers know their own skill level better — where they are now as well as helping them identify their own growth. It also provides a holistic view for the manager: hearing feedback about a designer from someone who works more directly with the designer provides an additional perspective. The manager may not have the same perception of the employee that is held by those with whom they work most closely.

Designers who work at companies with structured performance management processes are more likely to have an official process for requesting and receiving peer feedback: “I really liked that you can get feedback from others... it's nice, because I can get feedback on this project that my boss isn't really involved with and doesn't know much about” (P5).

**Theme: Participants wanted feedback to be a continuous, two-way conversation.** It was important to participants to be able to respond or talk through the feedback they receive. This ongoing contact approach serves multiple purposes: the manager has more opportunities to monitor progress and to give feedback, and the designer has more opportunities to discuss the feedback. Based on interview responses, for the design manager an ongoing conversation may make the whole process feel more authentic and less formal. For the designer, an ongoing conversation is an opportunity to update their manager on new achievements and advocate for themselves if they had received unfair feedback. One participant talked about wanting to clarify and correct negative feedback, especially since the feedback was going to be submitted to senior leadership:

“There was a lot in there that I did not agree with, or that I wanted to clarify... I would have really liked the chance to have a conversation about [my boss’s] interpretation of what I had submitted... so that was really kind of just frustrating and disappointing” (P6).

#### ***Stage 4: Reflection***

The designer makes progress toward their goals, monitors progress and implements feedback until the end of the specified timeframe. HR typically sends out communications informing of the yearly evaluation process and expectations. Designers are prompted to reflect on some period of time in preparation for the evaluation. During this stage, design managers are completing reflection activities on their own performance.

Participants confirmed that they saw value in the reflection process. They benefited from reflecting on what went well and reviewing how they were able to reach a goal. In this way, reflecting cements learning by prompting the designer to examine progress closely with the benefit of time and hindsight. Designers described feeling introspective when reflecting on the contexts of each success or challenge when thinking about the work they did over a given period. Reflecting helped them appreciate themselves, their skills, and their progress. With goals they did not reach, participants examined what went wrong and used these areas as a place to start planning new goals. As with the feelings of worry in the monitoring progress stage, some participants reported worrying about what they may find when they reflect if they had a hard cycle.

Designers felt that reflection helps them understand their current skill level better through the process of comparing old work to current work. Even if the previous work is not perfect, being able to look back and knowing how to improve it is evidence of growth to the designer. Participants also reported that the process of reflection helped them identify skills they did not know they had by seeing patterns in their work over time.

**Reoccurring theme: Participants judge themselves negatively for not being better at documentation.** Similar to the feelings shared about the monitoring stage, designers are *should-ing* during the evaluation process, often wishing they had kept better track of their accomplishments along the way: “[reflecting] always makes me feel like I should have done a better job keeping track and recording this” (P5). Without creating or ensuring adequate documentation along the way, many designers primarily rely on their memory which they acknowledge is faulty: “I struggle a lot when I’m told to recall my past year... a lot of times I’ll

go through and it might be just the most recent things that just stand out most in my memory” (P6). Participants worry that something important will be excluded from the reflection, impacting its accuracy and thoroughness.

### ***Stage 5: Evaluation***

This stage consists of the formal exercise of completing the performance evaluation artifact, that is, creating something that represents one’s progress and sharing it with a manager. This stage is important because it prompts a conversation with the manager, and the output of the evaluation may be used by many levels of the business to make company decisions. During this stage, designers are using the formal tools and framework provided by their employer to document accomplishments over the past cycle. The designer works through the formal self-evaluation, which is usually several questions. The system requires responses to be formatted either as prose or numerical rating scales. Once the designer has completed the self-evaluation, it is submitted to their manager for review. The manager traditionally sets up a meeting to discuss it with the employee. Other events may happen involving HR’s review of the documentation, but participants did not know much about what happened to performance evaluations after they are reviewed by their manager.

During this stage, design managers are gathering inputs for each employee and reflecting on what they have seen the employee accomplish over the period. They may refer to peer feedback or to accolades the designer has received over the period. With this in mind, design managers write a response to the designer’s submission. They may prepare notes to guide a discussion with the designer.

**Theme: Rating scales are easy to misunderstand and do not provide a nuanced picture of performance.** Most of the evaluations described by participants included a rating scale for some portion of the questions. These scales typically measured the employee’s performance from one to five against a metric such as company values. The rating scale may be used for self-evaluation, or in the evaluation of others. Participants (designers and managers) were generally unhappy with the rating scale, and their responses address a variety of weaknesses with the tool.

Participants described the difficulty using the scale because of the ambiguity of what the numbers mean. One participant shared their preference to rate with descriptive words rather than numbers (‘very bad,’ ‘satisfactory’ or ‘extraordinary’ rather than one to five). For this

participant, words would have provided a clearer picture of what the rating meant. One participant presented an example of a company providing a solution to this problem. The participant described that the company's system's user interface prompted the employee to rate themselves and included a description of what each rating meant and how they "have historically thought about different levels" (P1).

In some scenarios, the scales used three to mean 'satisfactory' and five to mean 'over the top extraordinary.' This seems like a system set up to encourage striving for the five. Design managers said if they rate someone as above average, they are required to write up a rationale; that is, they have to do extra work if their employee is special. This incentivizes the manager to rate the person as average. Depending on how the company connects numbers to decisions about raises and promotions, such a system could function as a way to get the most effort and productivity out of employees with the least likelihood they will be promoted (therein requiring higher pay). This approach may seem to provide the most favorable outcome for the company, but can also lead to burnout for employees.

Several participants mentioned being rated against company values which usually center around soft skills or business skills. Some found this focus on company values to be repetitive and too vague, while others, who liked their company values, felt it was a good approach. If the company values are well written and applicable to many fields, this can be a productive way to track soft skills. Otherwise, they may be just another meaningless metric.

One participant liked the slider because it was easier than writing up a description:

"I like that it's a slider... that one to five thing. Like that makes it a little easier... to kind of gauge how you feel about, the person that's been evaluated... I feel like, on a scale — like that's easy, instead of having to like, 'this person exhibited blah, blah, blah.' You know, it's just easier to do that" (P9).

Based on other indicators in this interview, it is likely that this participant preferred the slider because it allowed them to spend less time on the process. It may also be because designers are often more visually than verbally oriented. They can maneuver both skills quite successfully and must in order to succeed in this field. However, their primary style is visual rather than prose.

Alternatively, one participant working at a large company with a designer-friendly process had no numerical scales in their evaluation process, which they felt good about:



“I don't even want to be quantified... Maybe like if there was a sad, neutral, happy or something like that, but not like one through 10. [At my company] I feel like people are able to articulate how they feel without a scale” (P5).

A preference to rate against the job description was also mentioned:

“The job description should be well written enough that it's clear to the associate what are they responsible for in their role as a designer, and then also being able to look forward to like that next level of like, what's the next level in their career path?” (P8).

This participant also described how the company system required participants to rate themselves against the objectives they set for themselves — rating how well they think they did against a certain goal.

**Theme: Designers and design managers want to develop and track both hard *and* soft skills.** Participants commented on the importance of hard skills (knowledge of the tools of the trade) as well as soft skills (how to work with people). When asked what they would want to be rated on, designers wanted the reviewer to consider their character, situation, soft skills, work ethic, genuine effort, ability to produce under difficult circumstances, and their ability to communicate. In short, they want to be seen as a whole person, not merely as a collection of accomplishments or failings. Design managers agreed, also noting the importance of tracking growth of hard and soft skills.

Soft skills are easier to evaluate if the manager works on the same project as the designer, though this is rare. Otherwise, it may be necessary to collect peer feedback in order to evaluate soft skills accurately. Some company values address soft skills like leadership or client management, so in those scenarios designers were being measured against soft skills.

**Theme: Designers wanted to communicate their accomplishments and challenges by showing the context of each individual project as well as communicating an overall message, similar to a portfolio.** They found the formal evaluation system to be limiting:

“...There was just a couple of text fields that you completed in response to some questions... but that didn't really give the sense of context that I really wanted to communicate. It was also a gap in the sense that a lot of the work that I do is very design focused. And that was going to get lost in that sort of technology” (P6).

The interviews explored how designers and managers think about portfolios. Creating a portfolio is a process of self-evaluation and reflection. Depending on its intended use, the

portfolio may or may not accurately document weak areas or challenges faced. Designers spoke about their portfolio as something that should represent them: a highly personal artifact, and something they wanted to feel proud of.

Participants conceptualized portfolios as evidence for their strengths, and talked about creating their portfolio while in school or to prepare to search for a new job. One design manager described working with a professor to identify strengths and weaknesses and planning what areas to focus on in their portfolio. They continued, “if the [performance management] process was more like hey, each year as a designer, how can we better your portfolio? That is a far more fruitful exercise than like, spreadsheets and scalings from one to five” (P4).

**Theme: Participants pointed out the importance of being honest with yourself to get the most value out of self-evaluation and reflection.** The portfolio is mostly a promotional tool to get a job; it is used to communicate skills and experience to strangers. Its purpose is more to show accomplishments rather than growth. However, the output of an evaluation should show both accomplishments and growth. Depending on how the evaluation is used or approached, the employee may choose to show themselves in a more positive light. This reluctance to document challenges could be because they do not trust the process, or because they have no insight into who will see the output of the evaluation, or due to the criteria used to evaluate the portfolio.

Without this knowledge into where the content goes, designers may feel the formal self-evaluation exercise is either risky or futile. They do not know what will happen to the content they submit – it could be nothing, it could be positive feedback, or it could be some surprising, negative feedback. P9 joked, “before this, they would send you questions via email like ‘what are your goals for next year?’ then send it to HR, put it in a pot and stir it around.”

Participants that referenced external motivators more frequently were more likely to bring up the topic of honesty during their interviews, though they spoke about honesty in two opposite ways. Some described the futility of the evaluation process, as they knew they could abuse it through dishonesty:

“You can say anything in your evaluation, right? And the evaluators are already prepared to interpret what you're saying within the context of ‘this person is going to be presenting the best possible picture of themselves.’ It's like a dating profile” (P6).

Without insight into what criteria they were being evaluated against or how they could move up, being honest about shortcomings or mistakes may seem less important and highlighting positive aspects may seem more important.

The opposing view used honesty as a place to push off from: “it gives you room to advocate for yourself if you’re like, ‘hey, you know, I was a little weak in this area. But here’s what I want to improve on. Or here are the steps I’ve taken already to get better’” (P1). These participants also talked about having the opportunity to discuss their reflection with their manager and go over feedback together. When both the designer and design manager expect to have this element of follow up and collaboration, I would hypothesize that people are more likely to be honest in their self-reflection.

Design managers struggle with this aspect of reviewing the portfolios of potential new hires. They try to discern what is honest and what is self-promotion to get an accurate picture of the person’s skills and accomplishments:

“It’s like, okay, I’m looking at this project on your portfolio, and you got to like, try to investigate the project, almost like, what role did you play? What skill sets did you use? Did you do that? Or did someone else do that? ...you really got to like Sherlock Holmes the portfolio” (P4).

### **Examining the Users**

After reviewing how the participants experienced the process of performance management through these five stages, the data was examined for similarities in behaviors, beliefs, and mental models. Insights about the user’s psychology emerged as well as four behavioral archetypes.

### ***User Psychology***

Performance management can be a deeply personal experience; being evaluated puts the employee in a vulnerable position and can bring up questions of self-worth. Designers are deeply dedicated to their craft, and this adds to the weight that an evaluation can have for them. From the range of topics brought up by participants, a safe inference would be that psychological safety is an important need to consider when designing a human-centered performance evaluation.

Research on creativity leans heavily on the fact that creatives are intrinsically motivated, so the interviews probed participants’ motivation for doing their work. Responses showed that

participants were motivated by either a love of art or a love of people; generally, graphic designers spoke about the importance of aesthetics and beauty, and UX designers and the service designer spoke about a fascination with humans. Both commented that they liked the challenge of solving problems by using their creativity. The elements that I explored in this research that increase engagement for designers are identifying growth or progress and fulfillment or pride in work.

**Identifying growth or progress.** It was difficult for participants to articulate how to identify individual, professional growth. Mostly the participants referred to an internal measure, where growth is measured by how it feels to do the work. Some examples used were how confident they feel in the work or how easy the work felt to accomplish. Growth in soft skills was also mentioned; for example, working with clients in a more strategic manner than before. Reflecting on past work was also mentioned as a way to identify growth. Because many designers are internally focused so that the indication of growth is a feeling rather than a goal post, I would hypothesize that they may be constantly monitoring their progress albeit internally (“how does this feel?” or ‘this suddenly feels different today’).

Measurable indicators of growth mentioned included:

- increasing the types of deliverables they can produce,
- decreasing the time it takes to complete tasks,
- learning more software or applications,
- receiving a new job offer,
- receiving a promotion,
- receiving a pay raise,
- seeing an increase in responsibilities, and
- hearing praise from peers.

Design managers say they can see incremental changes in their employees through their one-on-one conversations. A design manager shared a thoughtful and intentional approach to track growth: they had direct reports answer a series of questions at the annual review, and then referred back to those questions to reflect on the designer’s answers at the following annual review. Those questions are as follows:

- What position do you see yourself growing into? (Senior, Art Director, Manager, etc.)

- What kind of projects would you like to work on in the future?
- What skills would you like to develop, whether hard skill or soft skill?
- Are there additional tools or training you need in order to accomplish your tasks or to support your professional development?
- What are your most important goals for next year?
- Identify one or two career goals in the coming year and how you plan to achieve them.
- What do you think I can do differently?
- How can the design team improve processes and procedures?

**Feeling a sense of pride.** Designers said they felt pride when seeing their impact on others. Specifically, their contribution and the impact they have on a team (through leading a vision for example), their impact on the end user of a product, or when seeing mentees achieving success. Designers also felt proud when teammates were happy with their work, when they thought about completing a tough project with limited resources, or about having worked hard to achieve success on their own.

External motivators also made designers feel proud, such as being promoted or being able to show how much money the company is bringing in thanks to their design. One participant mentioned winning design awards, though they clarified that while the validation was nice, winning awards mostly makes it easier to get future jobs rather than truly inspiring feelings of pride.

The interviews covered behaviors and practices around portfolio development. Designers reported they are usually proud of the portfolio when they get it updated, but that pride fades quickly once it is out of date. All participants reported that their portfolios were not up to date, which points to the limited way portfolios are in use today.

### ***Identifying Behavioral Archetypes***

Based on the participant interviews, feelings and beliefs about performance management seemed to fall along a spectrum of ways of thinking, from analytical to artistic, and along a second dimension of positive or negative affect related to performance evaluation. Graphing these two dimensions, as in Figure 1, led to the emergence of four archetypes: the Achiever, the Sage, the Maverick, and the Explorer. The archetypes were not determined by how many participants fell into each category; some archetypes are more sparsely populated than others.

These archetypes help to understand the range of behaviors and feelings involved in performance evaluation for designers; they are not intended as rigid categories to be applied to designers — inside or outside the scope of this particular study.

**Analysts and Artists.** As the interview data was analyzed, it became evident that participants existed on a spectrum of ways of thinking, from analytical to artistic. Thus, in Figure 1, the Achiever and the Sage are more analytical: they tend to be practical, methodical, and to appreciate clear boundaries and expectations from the evaluation process. Analytical designers are likely to invest more time in the formal evaluation process and may spend less time in informal, undocumented processes. The Explorer and the Maverick appear on the other end of the spectrum with more artistic and creative natures: they are more likely to be internally focused and prefer internal metrics over external metrics (how something feels rather than how it is quantified). They are likely to spend less time on the formal evaluation process but may spend more time on informal, undocumented processes.

On the other end of the spectrum, the Achiever and Sage were similar in that they spoke more often about wanting to set goals for where they could contribute to the team. These archetypes reflect a positive orientation to the evaluation process, hoping to use the process to make an impact and increase their value. In contrast, the Explorer and Maverick more frequently talked about getting through the evaluation process so that they could focus on their own independent growth.

Each of these archetypes will be discussed in some detail, along with a description of how the user journey might look for that archetype.

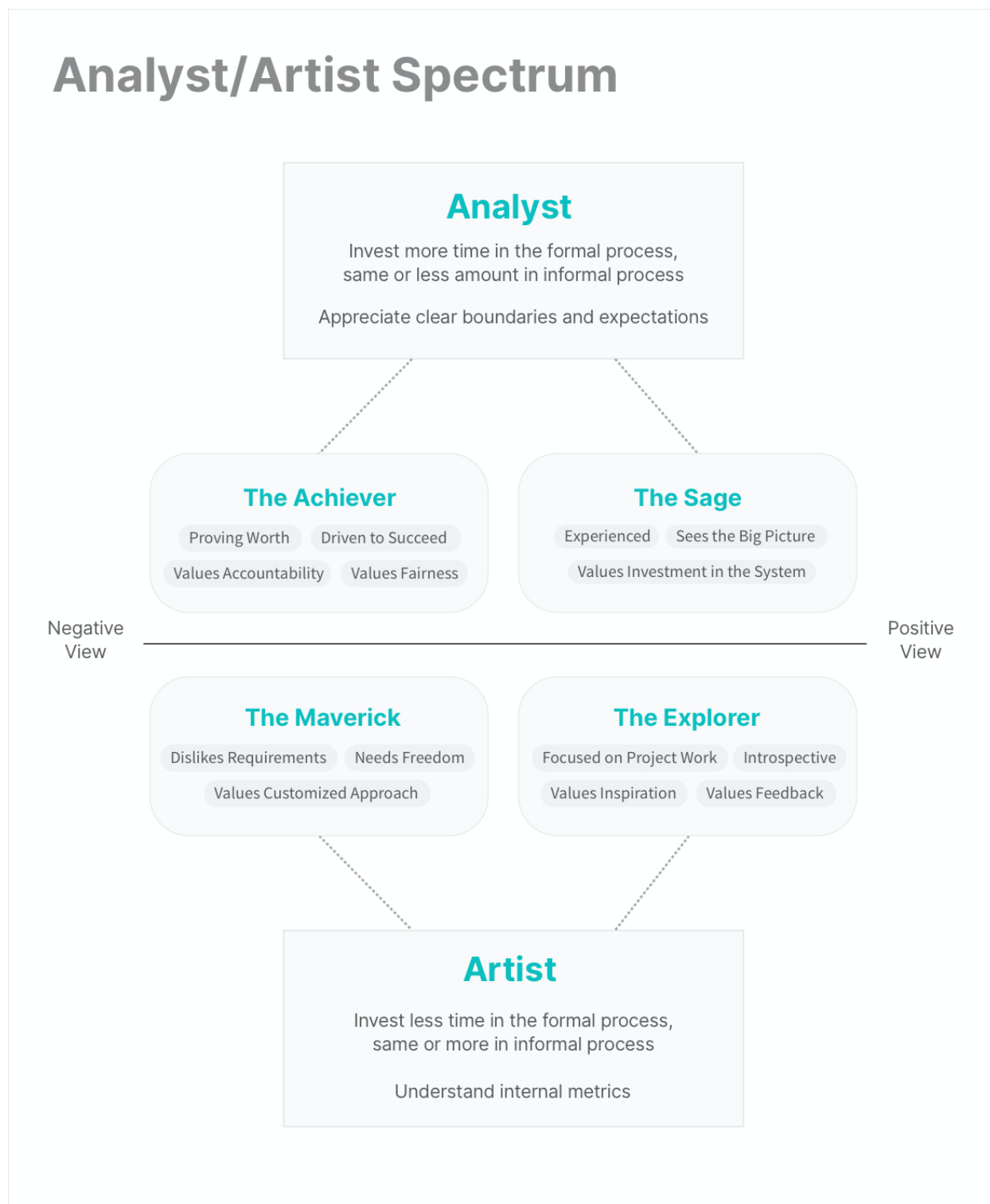


Figure 1. Analyst/Artist spectrum.

**The Achiever.** The Achiever understands the rules of the business world, but sees the unfairness of how traditional performance evaluations have been implemented. This archetype

has a strong sense of self-worth and knows that design brings great financial value to a business, but they are concerned that the performance evaluation process won't show this value:

“I want to prove to the world that designers have ideas, and these prototypes that we build are what allows a design to get built in the first place... I don't think designers get enough credit for that kind of stuff” (P1).

In response to the performance evaluation, the Achiever is likely to invest time in the process and may even develop additional documentation to submit with their review. They see supporting visuals as evidence of their growth, value and hard work, and include this extra documentation to the evaluation as a way to prove themselves: “[its] just providing like, proof... look, you can see for yourself that this was done” (P6).

Achievers want to appear to their manager in the best possible light, but also may not trust their manager's interpretation or understanding of their work: “I didn't fully trust my manager enough... I just did it on my own” (P1). This may also be a reason for supplying extra documentation with the evaluation.

The Achiever sees the primary value of the formal evaluation process as a way to get promoted or achieve some external reward. These rewards were acknowledgements that the business saw their worth and respected them. The Achiever may equate the performance management process with the framework of school or academics, likening an evaluation or bonus to a grade or report card: “my understanding of bonuses like that was that they are sort of like a report card.. it's sort of the company saying, ‘Hey... here's how we think you did’” (P6).

Respect, fairness and clear expectations are key values for this audience; they are most frustrated by systems that do not have clear requirements or transparent processes. Since they are expected to ‘play the game,’ they try to demand fair rules for how to succeed:

“At [my current company]... the weakness of the process is that there's no transparency into really any of it. We have these discussions about roles and expertise... but there's really nothing, it just stops there. You 'now, it's no real recommendations for next steps. There's really no transparency into how compensation is calculated” (P6).

(see Appendix C: Achiever Archetype)

***Through the journey.*** In stage 1: setting a direction, the Achiever's intention is to have a conversation with their manager about understanding expectations: for example, what do they need to do to get promoted. The Achiever's motivation is to reach an agreement with their



manager that particular behaviors will lead to a particular outcome or reward at the end of the evaluation cycle.

In stage two: monitoring progress, the Achiever is more likely than other archetypes to keep track of progress so they can update their supervisor. They value accountability and may make an effort to have a paper trail documenting the agreement.

In stage three: getting and receiving feedback, the Achiever wants to have an ongoing, two-way conversation so they can advocate for themselves and correct misunderstandings, receive feedback, and update their manager on their progress.

In stage four: reflection, the Achiever are likely to invest time in creating something with their reflection. They may create extra documentation to support the evaluation because they may not trust their manager to understand or carry through the right message about their performance. They see providing extra documentation as giving them the best chance at being recognized for their good work.

In stage five: evaluation, the Achiever strongly desires transparency into evaluation criteria. At this stage, they may feel frustrated as they pull together documentation if there is no transparency into what will get them promoted.

**The Sage.** The Sage has a deep understanding of the different factors at play in the performance management process. They have a wide variety of performance evaluation experiences, from highly structured systems to almost no structure. They see real potential in the exercise, but equally acknowledge how frequently the system falls short for designers:

“I’ve used a lot of bad performance management systems before. A lot of them were intended to be HR systems that they would then go and try to customize... We need to think about how can we customize the HR system to the design role” (P8).

This archetype has a patient and accepting approach to the performance evaluation process, and sees it as an opportunity for growth rather than a hurdle. The Sage is likely to urge companies and managers to invest in the process to make it better for designers. They appreciate structure and company-wide investment in performance management: “I just feel like when you talk about goal setting with your team or with the company, especially from a leadership perspective, it makes everyone feel like they're not just doing the work as if they're checking off checkboxes” (P7); “I think people *want* to work somewhere where design is like appreciated and there's like career paths and things like that” (P8).

The Sage may spend time preparing for the evaluation conversation and may come with a prepared statement. While they recognize the importance of highlighting their achievements in the evaluation, they are also likely to see honest self-reflection as a key benefit provided by the process. Sages are likely to be open and honest if they did not complete a goal, and use that imperfection as a place to begin planning for the next cycle of evaluation:

“So that conversation, I would come prepared with some bullets around things that I think I did extremely well in this year, as well as some things where, maybe I want to maybe take a fresh look at or maybe refine in some way for the next year” (P7).

(see Appendix D: Sage Archetype).

***Through the journey.*** In stage 1: setting a direction, the Sage, who is organized and practical, likely has last cycle’s evaluation at hand as they think about future goals. They may lean on their varied experience and may follow a clear formula for setting goals. When choosing goals, they are likely to think about how their actions will impact others. They think strategically; they want to set meaningful goals that contribute to the mission of the company. They are willing to work to set a clear metric for goals as a way to communicate whether they reached the goal.

In stage two: monitoring progress, the Sage updates their progress every so often in order to be prepared for quarterly evaluations and to check if they are on the right track and moving at the right speed.

In stage three: receiving feedback, the Sage is likely to appreciate a comprehensive view of their performance which includes feedback from their manager as well as peers.

In stage four: reflection, the Sage will spend time thinking through what they did well and how, in preparation for the evaluation conversation with their manager.

In stage five: evaluation, the Sage approaches the evaluation artifact and manager interview thoughtfully, and believes the system has their best interest at heart. They are generally willing to be evaluated against formalized, thoughtful metrics (like leadership behaviors) so they can get the most out of the process.

**The Maverick.** The Maverick sees almost no value in the process of corporate performance evaluation. They value freedom and flexibility, creative thinking and solutioning above all. They strongly resist strict rules, which they see as irrelevant and suffocating: “it’s something I’ve had to struggle with, and I have to get better at is, as a manager, you have to have

process and structure. But as a designer and artist, I hate both those things” (P4). They tend to dislike quantitative metrics and see them as stripping away the humanity of an artist: “I think filling in spreadsheets and scaling people on one to five... people aren’t numbers. I think it’s all crap” (P4). The Maverick generally respects and values portfolio development because it is created by and is a recognized standard for designers; however, performance evaluation is not typically created by someone with design experience, which makes it feel less applicable.

The Maverick may have had several different jobs under different performance management processes but have had mostly all negative (or unsupportive) experiences with evaluation: “At my previous companies, there was no real system — you just knew at the end of year or six months you would have a conversation... this current company is the only one I’ve been at that has a tool where you enter things” (P9).

The Maverick prefers a more frequent, more casual approach to performance management: “This is my own personal bias: people find it easier to talk about this kind of stuff when, you know, it’s not a formal thing or a formal process” (P4). They acknowledge the value of reflecting but do not want to spend a lot of time filling out forms or generating content for a performance evaluation.

The Maverick may feel they are at the mercy of outside forces. For the design manager, this position takes the form of frustration with having to implement a process they do not see as valuable; they are frustrated with the requirement imposed by someone outside the design field. For the designer, this position may be expressed as frustration with unfairness:

“If your manager doesn’t necessarily understand this situation, or because we work in teams, there may be things where you have blockers that are caused by other people, but then it reflects badly on you... then you’re at the mercy of [your manager] and their interpretation of things” (P9).

They also acknowledge how business decisions outside of their control impact whether they can reach their goals: a business opportunity may fall through, or they may have a heavy workload so they cannot address their personal goals.

The Maverick would prefer to create their own process than comply with company requirements. When they do create their own process, it feels more authentic and thoughtful to them:

“[when I started managing designers] I guess the biggest one was, how can I do it so that it feels a little bit more natural and more authentic, as opposed to like, this is just something we have to do at the end of each year. So that influenced my approach to like, make it more of an ongoing conversation” (P4).

(see Appendix E: The Maverick Archetype)

***Through the journey.*** In stage one: setting a direction, the Maverick is frustrated at being required to define metrics that do not mean anything or that are inappropriate. With their preference for an ongoing, casual approach, they may set goals but not define a specific plan to execute them. This avoidance of specificity may be an effort to make room for the changes of business that will likely occur: changes, ambiguities and unknowns. It also is in line with their desire for freedom and flexibility.

In stage two: monitoring progress, the Maverick wants on-going, authentic conversations. A simple discussion is most valuable to this archetype.

The Maverick is not necessarily afraid of feedback, and in stage three: feedback, they value the feedback provided by someone with more seniority in their field. They may discount feedback from those whose expertise doesn't feel relevant to them.

In stage four: reflection, the Maverick has respect for the reflection process in so far as it is self-motivated and self-driven and helps them improve their craft. They may value the process of portfolio review, analyzing strengths and weaknesses to get a clear idea of where they are and where they should go next.

In stage five: evaluation, the Maverick is complying with the evaluation process to fulfill a requirement, not necessarily to earn a promotion. They still want transparency, and to understand what is being asked of them so they can give a suitable relevant answer. Having clear instructions allows them to get the evaluation done quicker and without being penalized for rushing through it. They want to fulfill the requirements and get back to the world of design. Lastly, when discussing their performance, they will want to be able to communicate circumstances that were out of their control so they are less likely to be misjudged.

**The Explorer.** The Explorer may be the closest to the traditional archetype of an artist, truly designing for the sake of creating. The Explorer complies with company requirements of performance evaluation but primarily so they can get back to what they love: design work. The Explorer is thoughtful and reflective, though unlikely to document these internal explorations: “I

constantly do a lot of self-reflection. Especially like when I wrap up a project, like I try to think about how could I have done this better? Or, you know, how happy am I with the end result? I talk to my supervisor a lot about it” (P2). They are preoccupied with the enjoyment they get from project work, and they may find it easier to reflect than to plan for the future.

The Explorer may be more passive when it comes to career advancement (“I’ve been mostly like, go with the flow, kind of, and not really taking much charge of my career” (P5)) and may not have long-term plans (“I just don’t really have a clear vision of what I’m progressing to” (P2)).

Inspiration is a key value for this audience, and they are on a lifelong pursuit to hone their craft. Inspiration fuels their excitement for their work as well as acting as a trigger for reflection to evaluate their own skill level:

“I think through different activities, and you know, seeing other people's work and like having inspiration, being inspired by other people, your peers, it does cause you to think about what you're doing and how you can make yourself better... a lot of designers actually feel the need to better themselves and be inspired by others” (P9).

The need to be inspired by others drives them to value connection and community. Even though this archetype is internally focused, the importance of the role of others came through in their responses. They spoke about feeling pride when their teammates acknowledged their work: “I’m also proud that that my workmates are happy with the quality of the work I produce, even if sometimes I wish I could do better. And that's something that drives me to do better every time” (P2).

Feedback, even if it is hard feedback, is a key value to this audience:

“I think all kinds of feedback is helpful. Yeah, I would never look at feedback as a hindrance. I mean, sometimes I would take something personally. But at the same time, it's like, yeah, like I kind of miss having like a mentor who could look at my work and see that this or that could be better” (P2).

The Explorer wants to know what others think of them, they want to make others proud, and they know others are essential to their own growth (see Appendix F: Explorer Archetype).

***Through the journey.*** In stage 1: setting a direction, the Explorer may or may not document goals if it is not required, or they may document them in personal tools like a notebook or the Notes app on their phone. They may be resistant to a formal process at first but

may later come to see the value in it: “I think it just helped me like to have like a career plan. Whereas if I was given the choice, like, maybe I wouldn't have done that” (P5).

They may be at a loss to come up with goals and feel like they need advice: “Sometimes I feel like I need to talk to my peers or my boss to see what can I be doing to keep progressing and keep pursuing that next promotion. Obviously there is the work I’m hired to do, but what other things can I be doing?” (P5).

In stage two: monitoring progress, the Explorer is not likely to keep track of their work, but they are likely to feel that they *should* keep better track of their work. They rely on their check-ins with their manager to document anything that needs to be documented, and expect the manager to direct them if they are off course. If an email from HR reminds them to update their progress, that’s fine; otherwise monitoring progress is not top of mind.

In stage three: feedback, the Explorer wants feedback from peers because it helps them know themselves and their skill level better. They want close attention to their work and quality feedback so they can improve their craft. They value the inspiration provided by a community.

In stage four: reflection, the Explorer takes more time and tries to get something real out of the reflection process. They feel introspective and accomplished. They are likely to be should-ing and comparing old work against current work so they can see how much they have grown and in what ways.

In stage five: evaluation, the Explorer may feel that the company-imposed performance metrics are irrelevant or repetitive, but may wish that the process were more relevant or helpful.

#### **Individual factors and correlations between archetypes and analyst/artist spectrum.**

I hypothesized that three factors could impact where people fell on the analyst/artist spectrum or within the four archetypes. These three factors are design field, number and quality of past experiences with performance evaluation, and years of experience.

The strongest correlation was between design field and placement on the analyst/artist spectrum. Of the nine participants interviewed, five of them were currently working as graphic or visual designers, three were UX designers, and one was a service designer. As one would expect, those in the graphic or visual design field fell primarily on the artist side of the spectrum, although not universally. In almost a mirrored reflection, nearly all UX designers fell on the analyst side and only one UX designer fell into the artist category. The one service designer fell into the analyst category as well.

In terms of their prior experience with performance evaluations, participants fell into three groups: 1) those who had worked at multiple places, experiencing many different performance management systems, 2) those who had worked multiple places but experienced largely the same performance management systems, and 3) those who had worked at only one place and had experienced only one system.

For the first group who had worked at multiple places, the systems they experienced ranged widely from well thought-out and extensive to non-existent. As might be expected, these participants had a deeper understanding of what made a good system and had an appreciation for formalized structure. However, they felt that the *amount* of structure was not the key to making the process perfect for designers. This category included mostly Sages and one Achiever, and their experience with a variety of systems may play a large part in their conviction that performance evaluation has the potential to be valuable.

The second group had worked at multiple places but experienced similar evaluation systems from company to company. Their experiences ranged from mediocre (formalized but uninspiring) to non-existent systems. This category included mostly Mavericks and one Achiever. Having similar setups at multiple jobs likely contributed to the Mavericks' frustration and general distrust of formal performance evaluation.

The final group had worked at just one place and experienced just one system. The maturity level of these systems varied; some had a mediocre system, and others had a robust, designer-friendly system. This group was almost entirely made up of Explorers. The Explorer is more interested in honing their craft than driving their career, which may be why they have stayed at just one company. Their limited experience with performance management was not due to a lack of years of experience, however, as the Explorer archetype included those with a range of years of experience. I would hypothesize that a mediocre evaluation system would not make an Explorer leave a job because as long as they are getting to do the work, the job fulfills quite a large need.

### **Responses to Initial Concepts**

During the discovery interviews, participants were presented with a series of low fidelity sketches that showed what the experience of a designer-friendly, quarterly self-evaluation (or 'reflection') might look like. The participants watched over Zoom as I shared my screen and walked them through the sketches. The flow included eight screens and starts with the user

clicking a button called ‘start a reflection’. The user completes a summary section on how their fourth quarter went, reports on progress toward different pre-set goals, progress on different projects, adds a goal, and finally reviews it all in a ‘story view’ with the option to edit or send it to their boss for review (see Appendix A: Initial Sketches).

Overall, participants (regardless of archetype) liked the ability to add visuals and documents to their reflection and commented that this was something missing from current self-evaluation systems and processes. For the participants in this study, their current HR software has no tools to track or collect work; during the evaluation meeting with the manager, they discuss the work they did but do not usually look at it. Participants felt that most current self-evaluation processes prompted reflection but did not allow them to represent themselves adequately. I would hypothesize that the non-visual format of these traditional evaluation tools makes it harder to get excited about or be invested in the process.

Some participants, primarily Achievers, mentioned going around their company's standard self-evaluation technology and creating their own self-evaluation product, either on a webpage or by creating a keynote document: “I just want to show the problem that was solved and how I solved it. I want to show a picture of the work, not so much the particulars of the project” (P6). The visual documents are seen as proof of an accomplishment; in the way that a metric proves someone completed a goal, the visual document is seen as the “proof” that some goal was reached. The artifacts support what they are saying, and that they are telling the truth about what they did.

### ***Strengths***

Participants commented that the prototype flow gave a richer picture of what was going on and looked more enjoyable to fill out than current systems. Participants appreciated being able to see progress on all projects in one place and felt that the system was “rooting for me and wants me to root for myself” (P1).

**Frequency.** One participant liked the idea of reflection as a quarterly activity and felt it would help her keep her work current. This quarterly cycle is different than most of the processes participants reported, which were usually performed only once or twice a year. Participants felt that in the prototype would make it achievable to engage in evaluation quarterly, although no participant wanted to engage in evaluation more frequently than quarterly.



**Reflecting on hard parts.** On the summary screen of the prototype, the user is given text fields to answer the following questions individually: 1) What are you most proud of? 2) What did you make the most progress on? 3) What are you most excited about? 4) What were the hard parts? 5) Summary reflection. Participants mentioned liking the prompt that asks about challenges over the quarter, and the prompt about what they are most proud of, because it allowed them to describe what happened and how they felt about it: “it’s always like [I’m] trying to justify why I’m rating like this instead of explaining the whole story... I have to tie everything to a [company] value constantly instead of just saying ‘well this is what happened, this is how I feel my year went.’ So yeah I like that” (P2).

**Uploading documents.** The prototype’s ability to add documents and visuals was popular among participants. Participants imagined looking back at work from previous quarters as way to reflect on how they had grown. It was also mentioned that uploading the documents was a way to further verify that you achieved a goal: “If [our system] was something like this where you can actually see like, upload photos to show how you’ve achieved your goals and stuff.... I really love that and I think it would be so helpful” (P3).

**Organizing by project.** The initial concept includes screens that prompt the user to reflect on accomplishments toward goals as well as on specific projects. This is an attempt to acknowledge the interconnectedness of projects and goals, and the close connection between projects and goals was affirmed by participants: “I like the idea of adding projects to be able to show visual examples of what they worked on — that’s so important to a design role” (P8).

**Story view.** The final screen of the flow shows a “story view” of all the content the user has just entered. This is to communicate how things went over the quarter in a narrative format. This narrative approach was popular among participants, some even mentioning the story view was the strongest thing about the prototype: “that’s really what this is about, building out a story and having that captured in one place” (P6). Another participant felt that the story view was helpful because having those visuals “empowers and enables the designer to tell their story” (P1). Other participants commented that the story view was much more engaging than what they have now, which they described as “clunky” and “a block of text.”

### ***Areas for Further Development and Exploration***

Design managers wanted to know where they fit into the process and if they would be able to provide feedback on the content submitted in a reflection. Additionally, the concept does

not acknowledge soft skills, and this was pointed out: “What if I wanted to get better at presenting? How could this tool show that?” (P4)

Participants suggested providing alternate ways of communicating, perhaps providing the ability to rank things with a slider or star rating rather than a long-form text write up. This was an interesting suggestion considering the dislike for scales expressed earlier in the interviews.

When adding a new goal, participants suggested prompting the user to think through how they could break down the goal into actionable steps, and to give examples of goals or guidance on what goals to set. This suggestion connects back to the theme of having difficulty setting goals.

On the summary screen, some participants felt this was the right amount of questions, but others felt that “What are you most proud of?” and “Where did you make the most progress?” might frequently be the same answer and become repetitive. It was also noted that “What are you most excited about?” may be better placed at the end of the flow, once the designer has reflected and is ready to look to the next cycle.

Participants commented that their goals shift and change over a period of time — some getting more fluid and less defined while others become more defined. They wanted a structure that would provide a level of customization and account for those changes.

On the outline view, participants expected to have the ability to reorder the sections or give some extra prominence. This is a fair and reasonable request and reflects the training that designers have in expertly crafting a message.

**Honesty in reflection.** Viewing the initial sketches brought up the recurring theme of psychological safety when reflecting on one’s progress. Some participants said they would feel safe to share their honest reflections, while another commented that they may not want to discuss the hard parts of a project with their manager. This participant felt that they needed to have control over the final product and what the manager sees in order to feel safe enough to confide.

Other participants were open to exploring honestly; they pointed to the prompt on the summary screen asking what the hard parts were as a positive. They commented that without that prompt, the designer might only focus on the things that went well and ignore what can be learned from challenges. One designer commented that they wanted to see a prompt to identify even more challenges: one for each project rather than just in the summary section. A design manager pointed out the value in asking about the hard parts as an opportunity to communicate

the outside influences that may have kept the designer from as much success as they wanted: “[associates] may be able to capture something they feel like was an impact on their outcome for the quarter or something like that. I like how this is kind of prompting that discussion” (P8).

One participant suggested that the tool should allow designers to select only certain goals that they did particularly well on and then build out a story view for those, so the designer could control the final message presented to the reviewer. In a situation where the employee is being evaluated only once a year, it does make sense to be concerned about showing oneself in a primarily positive light. However, modern approaches to evaluation and performance management encourage more frequent, more casual evaluations. With multiple opportunities throughout the year to share progress and accomplishments, the designer may be less likely to feel the need to carefully curate a facade rather than an honest picture of their growth. This points to the importance of the tool clearly communicating that it is meant to track and present growth, not measure levels of perfection, which may be a mental shift for some audiences.

Additionally, without insight into how the data will be used, designers cannot be expected to fully trust the tool. Designers may feel open to sharing a realistic impression of themselves to their manager but would not want that going to senior management. This points to the importance of the tool providing transparency about what happens with the data submitted by designers.

**Catering to different audiences and needs.** The output of an evaluation has different uses for different stakeholders. The purpose of this study is to explore what the evaluation process might look like working from the designer up, rather than from the top down as it has been traditionally developed. While the designer and their manager may benefit from seeing the designer’s process and visual outputs, members of senior management or HR may care only about outcomes. Participants commented that making this useful for senior management might look like providing a PDF of a consolidated version, or even routing a text-only version to senior management. However, this assumption should be validated through additional interviews with designers and managers.

The interviews touched on how designers with varying levels of enthusiasm for documentation and structure might respond to these initial sketches. For those that want more freedom from requirements like the Maverick, participants suggested exploring what the less structured version might look like. They also acknowledged that while designers may not *want*

to do the evaluation documentation, the reality is that documentation is required if they really want to grow: “Even those designers, artists that don’t like structure, they have to apply some sort of structure if they want to keep track of their progress” (P4). The audience may not want to do the documentation but they need to (either because of business requirements or because otherwise they may never progress toward anything), so the goal is to make it an enjoyable task. One way to design for this is by providing flexibility and limiting the number of required elements.

With insights into the user’s journey of performance management, thought processes and pain points, my research project moved on to making use of these learnings through the ideation phase.

Chapter 5: Ideation Phase: Define, design, and develop

The second phase of the HCD process, ideation, entails taking what was learned in the inspiration phase, generating a lot of ideas and then choosing one to design and eventually test with users. For this research project, the ideation phase includes both divergent and convergent thinking, beginning with two exercises to generate ideas and three exercises to narrow focus. Specifically, this chapter covers the results of creating user stories, performing a ‘how might we’ exercise, and how these were applied to the design of a content model, user flow and finally a prototype.

Divergent Thinking Activities

With insights from the user journey and answers to research questions, I followed the Agile user story framework to connect user needs to user goals for every stage of the journey. Writing the user stories for each archetype and each stage of the journey provided a clearer understanding of what tasks users needed to do at each stage in service of larger needs.

Next, I brainstormed questions of “how might we...” (HMW) solve the different problems discussed by users. The HMW statements were organized by phase of the journey. Many of the statements, if explored, would have ramifications for other phases of the journey. For instance, the way goals are set up impacts how a user will reflect on them and how they will track progress. It became clear that exploring and testing one HMW statement may lead to insights about the other phases as well.

These exercises generated a lot of ideas to explore. To pivot to convergent thinking and apply the user research to a design, I began exercises to narrow scope. I decided to focus on the experience of reflection and evaluation, as well as general audience needs. Affinity mapping the user stories and HMW statements showed two themes emerging: 1) leveraging the value of reflection and 2) measuring and tracking projects and goals. Relevant user stories and HMW statements were selected for further exploration.

Tables 3 and 4 show the user stories that were selected for the convergence phase:  
Table 3

*Ideation Theme (User Stories): Leveraging the value of reflection*

Sage	As a designer preparing for the evaluation (reflecting), I need to think through what did I do well? How did I do it? What do I want to take a fresh look at next cycle? So that I can be prepared for the final conversation with my boss.
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Achiever	As a designer preparing for the evaluation (reflecting), I want to craft a message about the story of each project to support my evaluation so that I have the best chance at being recognized for my good work.
Maverick	As a designer preparing for the evaluation (reflecting), I want to go through my work and think through my strengths and weaknesses so that I can get a clear idea of where I am and where to go next.
Explorer	As a designer preparing for the evaluation (reflecting), I want to compare my old work against current work so that I can see how much I've grown and in what ways.
Explorer	As a designer doing a formal evaluation I want the evaluation to ask me about relevant topics so that I can easily report on my progress and provide meaningful responses.
Achiever	As a designer doing a formal evaluation, I want to supply extra documentation so that I can provide context for my achievements.
Maverick	As a designer preparing for the evaluation (reflecting), I want to communicate what was out of my control, so that I can get more accurate feedback or responses to my submission.

Table 4

*Ideation Theme (User Stories): Measuring and tracking projects and goals*

Sage	As a designer setting goals for the year, I need to set a metric for my goals so that I can eventually communicate if I reached a goal and what I did in service of that goal.
Maverick	As a designer setting goals for the year, I need to set goals that are fluid so that I can respond to how things change in business, for ambiguities and unknowns.

Tables 5 and 6 show the HMW statements about the process and value of reflection and about measuring and tracking to be explored:

Table 5

*Ideation Theme (HMW Statements): Leveraging the value of reflection*

HMW make the evaluation match the mental model of reflection?
HMW make the process visual and prose?
HMW provide a format for designers to reflect on progress rather than just whether they reached a goal?
HMW design a way to document efforts with an acknowledgment that projects and goals are interconnected?
HMW make reflection experience feel safe so audience provides honesty?

Table 6

*Ideation Theme (HMW Statements): Measuring and tracking projects and goals*

HMW track and show soft skills?
HMW look at a do your best metric vs a pre-planned metric?
HMW design a way to document efforts with an acknowledgment that projects and goals are interconnected?
HMW allow for unknowns and changes to plans?
HMW ensure we ask the right questions so we collect the right data?
HMW provide a way to collect both progress metrics and success metrics?
HMW allow for different levels of engagement and different levels of enthusiasm for pre-planning?

**Convergent Thinking Activities**

***Creating a Content Model***

The process of developing a content model explored what evaluation data should be collected and how it could be connected. The content model explored how different entities needed to connect to each other and the labels to use for these entities (see Appendix G: Content Model). It was important to consider information architecture and the meaning created by the way content is connected. Creating these connections requires planning the different ways data may need to be shown. Based on the selected user stories and ‘how might we’ statements, the content model design starts to present solutions to user needs.

**A consolidated experience.** The connection between goals and project work was a specific theme in the interviews — that these things were reliant on each other. The new evaluation system is intended to exist within another tool that the employee uses daily, like Sharepoint or Microsoft Teams or Slack. This approach was validated by participant responses to the initial sketches and therefore carried through to the prototype. Table 7 includes user stories that capture this goal of a consolidated experience:

Table 7

*Inspiration: A consolidated experience*

User story	Maverick: As a designer preparing for the evaluation (reflecting), I want to go through my work and think through my strengths and weaknesses so that I can get a clear idea of where I am and where to go next.
HMW	HMW design a way to document efforts with an acknowledgment that projects and goals are interconnected?

**A flexible way to track goals.** The content model presents a framework for creating and tracking goals through ‘intentions’ and ‘actions.’ Intentions are themes or directions the designer wants to head in — or areas they want to intentionally grow in. They are meant to last for the long term. Actions are specific tasks a designer will do in service of the intention and can be added or cancelled at any time. This way, the designer has a direction to head in while still having flexibility to edit the plan to get there through actions.

Actions are tagged with a project. This encourages the designer to thinking about what opportunities they have available to them, and over time, could show how well an employee’s intentions are matching up with the projects they are assigned. This can inform discussions around resourcing and which designer gets placed on which project.

The content model is based on the idea that what you did is more important than whether you achieved a pre-planned goal. Unplanned accomplishments are often more impressive than planned ones and show that the employee can adapt to difficult circumstances and are willing to volunteer for something outside of their plan. The ability to create a ‘project’ helps account for unplanned accomplishments and provides flexibility for those who dislike planning ahead. The ‘project’ entity, as opposed to an intention, is a way to account for the unexpected projects that may not relate to any set intention. This allows the designer to still present that work as equally important even though it was unplanned. Alternatively, designers who are not into planning could use the tool at the end of the quarter to write about their contributions to their project teams and skip intentions entirely.

The word ‘intention’ might be unfamiliar to some but should not be completely foreign. The decision to introduce a specific goal-setting framework and use the term ‘intention’ in the prototype may mean there is a learning period for the user, impacting initial usability. This is not dissimilar from the introduction of OKRs as a goal-setting framework – all innovation requires some level of learning for the user. Good design balances innovation (what is new) with what is familiar to make the learning period an intuitive experience. Usability testing of the prototype will show how users respond and how much of a learning curve is required.

Table 8 shows the user story and HMW statement that inspired this design decision.



Table 8

*Inspiration: A flexible way to track goals*

User story	Maverick: As a designer setting goals for the year, I need to set goals that are fluid so that I can respond to how things change in business, for ambiguities and unknowns.
HMW	HMW allow for unknowns and changes to plans?

**A visualization of success instead of a quantitative metric.** As metrics were a key pain point from the discovery interviews, the content model proposes no metrics are needed. An intention entity has a piece of metadata called a ‘definition of success’ where the designer can work with their manager to set up their own individual visualization of success. This definition can determine whether the intention is complete or not. This also helps users reach the goal, by visualizing what success looks like. Table 9 shows the user story that spurred this design decision.

Table 9

*Inspiration: A visualization of success instead of a quantitative metric*

User story	Sage: As a designer setting goals for the year, I need to set a metric for my goals so that I can eventually communicate if I reached a goal and what I did in service of that goal.
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**Tracking soft skills and technical skills.** In order to track both soft skills and technical skills, a ‘Related Skills’ taxonomy is included in the content model. This allows the business to apply their company values to the process: when setting up intentions, users can tag an intention with a related skill to show they are working towards growing in that area. This will provide employees with guidance on areas they should try to grow in. This taxonomy could be accompanied by guidance on which skills and skill levels are required for promotion. Table 10 shows the HMW statement that inspired this design decision.

Table 10

*Inspiration: Tracking soft skills and technical skills*

HMW	HMW track and show soft skills?
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**Setting an action status.** The content model shows each action has a ‘status’ indicator. This allows the employee to report on progress rather than just whether or not they completed a goal. Table 11 shows the two HMW statements that inspired this design decision.

Table 11

*Inspiration: Setting an action status*

HMW	HMW provide a format for designers to reflect on progress rather than just whether or not they reached a goal?
HMW	HMW provide a way to collect both progress metrics and success metrics?

***Creating a User Flow***

Using the content model as a starting place to understand the data, I designed a flow for how users would complete the task of performing a reflection (see Appendix H: User Flow). The user flow explores the following concepts based on user needs.

**Creating a conversational flow.** Another goal of the design was to make the process feel fun and do-able. The user flow was inspired by the design and experience of doing taxes with TurboTax, a product which is well-known for calming jittery nerves before doing taxes. Performance evaluation is similar: people sit down to do it and have a wave of emotions associated with the task. I took cues from Turbo Tax design elements to make a tough task feel do-able. One way of doing that was through UX writing, using language and prompts that felt conversational. The purpose of reflection is to prompt reflective thought and provide context for the meeting with the manager to discuss strengths and weaknesses. The experience of using the tool should feel similar to a conversation with a coach or manager.

As I designed the flow, I tried to think about what information should be provided and at what time. What would be most helpful to know at different points? This conversational approach was validated by participant responses to the initial sketches and therefore carried through to the prototype. Table 12 shows the user story and HMW statement that inspired this design decision.

Table 12

*Inspiration: Creating a conversational flow*

User story	Maverick: As a designer preparing for the evaluation (reflecting), I want to separate out what was out of my control, so that I can get more accurate feedback or responses to my submission.
HMW	HMW make reflection experience feel safe so audience provides honesty?

**Asking the right questions.** The order and flow of the reflection process depends on the primary question the user is answering. The reflection must collect the right data, so it must ask

the right questions. In exploring “how might we make the evaluation match the mental model of reflection,” it became clear that the primary question for both the reflection and the evaluation process should be the same. So I examined the overall prompt: is it more important for the designer to answer “how did it go?” or “did you reach the goal”? These two questions lead to answers that help different audiences.

Managers need to see how their designers are growing, where they need encouragement and where they need rewarding. This is understood through examining a full picture of growth. Simply answering a binary question of whether or not a goal was reached is not nuanced enough to help the manager coach their designer. Asking about metrics that only matter to the business does not provide designers or managers with what they need to fulfill their role in the process.

For the designer, reflecting on “how did it go” is a different exercise than reflecting on “what progress did you make toward these objectives” or “how many new clients did you bring in?” The first question format opens the door to reporting on any number of ways the designer delivered value. The second question format limits the conversation to specific objectives and does not adequately account for how jobs work today. Table 13 shows the user story and HMW statement that inspired these decisions.

Table 13

*Inspiration: Asking the right questions*

User Story	Explorer: As a designer doing a formal evaluation I want the evaluation to ask me about relevant topics so that I can easily report on my progress and provide meaningful responses.
HMW	HMW ensure we ask the right questions so we collect the right data?

**Divided into digestible segments.** The design of TurboTax also influenced the navigation design in that it guides the user through a segmented process that but also lets the user see the whole process and dive in at any spot. This was an effort to provide thought prompts to encourage reflection. This element was validated by participant responses to the initial sketches and therefore carried through to the prototype. The navigation was refined from the initial sketches to have four sections: Outline, Summary and Highlights, Review and Update, and Looking Forward. Table 14 shows the user story and HMW statement that guided these design decisions.

Table 14

*Inspiration: Divided into digestible segments*

User	Sage: As a designer preparing for the evaluation (reflecting), I need to think through what did I do
Story	well? How did I do it? What do I want to take a fresh look at next cycle? So that I can be prepared for the final conversation with my boss.
HMW	HMW make the evaluation match the mental model of reflection?

**Story view.** This element was validated by participant responses to the initial sketches and therefore carried through to the prototype. Table 15 shows the user story that guided this design decision.

Table 15

*Inspiration: Story view*

User	Achiever: As a designer preparing for the evaluation (reflecting), I want to craft a message about
Story	the story of each project to support my evaluation so that I have the best chance at being recognized for my good work.

### ***Building a Prototype to Test***

With a content model and user flow as guidance, a prototype was created for eventual testing with users (see Appendix I: Prototype). The prototype was built using the prototyping tool, Framer, as it provides a high level of interactivity. Interactivity makes the experience of using the prototype feel more real. For the testing, I wanted participants to be able to engage with the tool particularly because of the personal subject matter. The tool does not collect user data, but it does allow the user to type directly into input fields as if they were writing real responses. The following concepts were explored through building a user interface and prototype.

**Documenting progress and success.** The language on the intention review screens prompts the user to reflect on progress they have made toward the intention, as well as update the status of actions. The question “how did it go” also allows for a “do your best” metric rather than “did you reach your goal” which only asks about a success metric. Progress metrics are also valuable, and more plentiful; when evaluations are more frequent, you will have more progress than accomplishments. Table 16 shows the HMW statements that inspired this design decision.

Table 16

*Inspiration: Documenting progress and success*

HMW	HMW provide a way to collect both progress metrics and success metrics?
HMW	HMW provide a format for designers to reflect on progress rather than just whether or not they reached a goal?

**Flexibility to add or adjust goals at any time.** The prototype needed to be built to allow for different levels of engagement. An employee can provide value whether or not they are enthusiastic about planning. The fact that you can add actions at any time during the evaluation cycle avoids penalizing designers who struggle to plan or have less interest in planning. Planning should be encouraged but not required. When considering the different mindsets of the Achiever, Maverick or Explorer — they approach planning differently. The Achiever may plan 20 actions, while the Maverick and Explorer may not be interested in investing much time in planning. In this way, the tool allows for different levels of enthusiasm for documentation through fewer requirements. Table 17 shows the HMW statements that guided these design decisions.

Table 17

*Inspiration: Flexibility to add or adjust goals at any time*

HMW	HMW allow for different levels of engagement and different levels of enthusiasm for pre-planning?
HMW	HMW look at a do your best metric vs a pre-planned metric?

**Ability to add documents.** This element was validated by participant responses to the initial sketches and therefore carried through to the prototype. Table 18 shows the user story and HMW statement that affirmed this design decision.

Table 18

*Inspiration: Ability to add documents*

User Story	Achiever: As a designer doing a formal evaluation, I want to supply extra documentation so that I can provide context for my achievements.
HMW	HMW make the process visual and prose?

## **Chapter 6: Implementation Phase: Usability testing results**

The third phase of HCD is characterized by testing a design idea with end users. This was done through usability testing, which evaluates how usable a tool (or prototype) is by measuring it against best practices and by observing user responses. The goal of this prototype was to answer research questions, iterate on the initial concepts shared in discovery interviews, and examine where the design aligned with the participant's mental model of reflecting on performance and progress.

The test was set up from the experience perspective of the designer, but the participants included both designers and design managers. This was not ideal, but testing proceeded in this manner due to time and resource limitations. Six people were interviewed: three designers and three design managers. All sessions were remote, over Zoom, and took an hour. The sessions began with introductory questions, then the participant tested the prototype and answered follow-up questions.

Participants were asked to imagine a scenario rather than submit responses about their own performance as the prototype did not save any data and an hour-long session would not have been sufficient for participants to record and then engage with their complex real-life situations. With a scenario, some elements of realistic behavior and response were lost, but fortunately these interviews still produced quality insights. The scenario was based on facts from discovery interviews in order to create a realistic experience. The scenario is as follows:

For our session today, pretend you work at a company as a visual designer named Kevin O'Donnell. Let's say you get an email letting you know it's time to do your 2021 year-end wrap-up. You'll use the system to "perform a reflection" on your professional growth and achievements over the last three months of the year.

### **Testing Results**

#### ***Usefulness***

All participants saw the tool as useful. This was communicated either by describing it as such directly or by acknowledging the different aspects of it that made it a useful tool. One of the problems with performance evaluations (and portfolios) is that they have limited use for designers. Performance evaluation is a requirement to complete, not an experience or tool that is generally seen as providing a real benefit for these users.

The prototype was useful in the following ways.

**A tool for ongoing tracking.** This is a tool they can use at any time in an iterative way, rather than just once every so often: “I actually assume that you'd be able to kind of go back into this throughout the whole year and... add more actions” (P15).

**Consolidated experience.** Though there were lingering questions about how projects and intentions related to each other, participants appreciated that these things were together in one place:

“I do like how it's in one place, too, because I think it can get a little bit precarious... if each individual is putting it in a Google doc somewhere, and it's all over the place. So it's really nice to be able to, you know, keep this within one program and to easily upload separate outputs but then kind of put it together for Human Resources. That's really nice” (P15).

They also appreciated having their own intentions documented in the system:

“At work, right now I feel like I have to have my intentions by myself, and they're not listed... they are listed there but it's actually harder to get to them. This is much cleaner and easier to get to” (P10).

Participants believed the reflection would be faster to fill out because of the consolidated nature.

**Relevant features.** The prototype provided several interactions that participants saw as valuable, such as setting the status of an action, adding images to responses, and downloading a copy of the reflection. This is covered more in-depth later in this chapter.

**A smooth flow.** Participants liked the segmented process, going through stages, and that the prototype walks you through the process. They commented that the flow was logical and smooth. Specifically, they commented that the prototype provided the right information at the right time, such as with the informing screen, the alert at the top of the story view, and with the intentions at the top of the portal homepage.

### ***Understanding the Context of the Scenario and Tool***

Due to the limited scenario and the awkwardness of interviewing design managers with a designer script and prototype, participants understandably had many questions about context: “That's the thing that's missing is the context. But I mean, I know that that doesn't belong in the interface. But it's difficult for me to say what I think is missing from the interface without having that context” (P13).

Participants wondered most about what content Kevin had entered in the system, what his manager might have put in, and what may have been provided by the company. They asked this question aloud, and then assumed “I would guess the individual sets it up and the manager approves it, and maybe there’s a conversation” (P12). This lack of context actually allowed the participant to fill in the blank. Participants understood the situation to be the same as the contexts reported by participants during the discovery interviews about the “setting a direction” stage, which validates that earlier research.

The prototype is also built on the idea that Kevin has been using the system for the entire year and went through the process of creating goals on some earlier occasion. Participants were able to discern this, but I watched each of them figure that out: “Oh, I guess I’ve already added these actions before” (P13).

Unsurprisingly, considering the audience, participants wondered how the larger system was designed: was there a larger taxonomy connecting data, how and when was the data collected, etc. They also wondered how the larger service was designed — the traditions around the employee’s relationship with the manager and if there was an approval process for the intentions and actions Kevin had created.

### ***Emotional and Mental Toll***

Completing a performance evaluation, even when it is framed as a ‘reflection,’ has considerable emotions attached to it. This was discussed in the discovery interviews as well, but without the presence of a prototype these emotions felt more abstract. Seeing participants go to fill out an evaluation, even pretending to be a designer named Kevin, brought up feelings of stress.

Two designers described the stress in terms of internal inspection. One designer discussed the stress of ensuring they were being accurate in their evaluation of themselves: “Maybe I take it too seriously, in the sense that I want it to be very honest, and that can take a little bit out of me” (P11). Another commented that they appreciated the ‘growth over perfection’ content on the informing screen because it addressed some of the pressure the user feels filling out an evaluation:

“I definitely like that note... Because I think some people can feel either overwhelmed or nervous about employee evaluations, because they want to do a good job, they want to constantly improve, but they also want to keep their job. So I think sometimes people can



feel a little nervous about setting something in stone. And then if it's either not accomplished or, priorities change over the year, I think people can feel nervous about how it's going to be reflected on either their job performance or their end of year review, or even just their position at the company, like if it would lead to termination or anything or no progression within the career ladder” (P15).

Design managers commented on stress in terms of the actual work involved with completing the process. A design manager commented on the length of time it says it will take in the informing screen (one to two hours): “Anything that says it's going to take me one to two hours scares the hell out of me. Anything like this, I feel like should be probably a 15-minute process” (P12). Two design managers commented on the design of the text input fields as being stressful (covered in more detail later in this chapter). I would hypothesize that this is because design managers have previous experience being required to write many more paragraphs overall than individual designers need to do; design managers may have to write five paragraphs for five designers for a total of 25 paragraphs.

### ***The Value and Purpose of Reflection***

Most participants saw the value in the reflection process and understood its purpose. Most responses described the reflection as something that would benefit both themselves (through introspection) and their manager (through meaningful communication). Some participants understood reflection to be more of a personal exercise, and some participants still had questions or were unsure.

The majority of participants understood the reflection as a benefit to both themselves and to the manager: “The value is not just to quantify to whoever is evaluating it that you've done these things, but also to remind you that these are actions you decided to take, these are things that changed, your progress” (P13). Participants described the performance evaluation as a way to level-set or foster communication with the manager. They also understood the value that reflection can have on improving the performance of employees: “Reflection is a component of learning... I think it serves to have people intentionally bring some self-awareness into their work instead of like, just trudging along, like recognize what their own, like growth needs are, and what their own wins are, so that they can become better employees” (P11).

Some participants understood the reflection as something inherently personal. The language and terms contributed to participant’s understanding of what the purpose of the

reflection was. To one participant, the term intention meant something personal and not work-related. Another participant commented that it *felt* personal even though it was something they understood would be sent to their manager.

Some participants had questions about the purpose of the reflection. For participants who were unsure, their lingering questions about the reflection were similar to the questions people mentioned in the discovery interviews about their current evaluations: “[The purpose of the reflection is] honestly a little unclear to me. I'm not sure how this gets used... What does the boss do with it? When they have them? Do they collect them and measure them over time?” (P12).

The first screen in the user flow, the informing screen, was meant to address many of these questions. All participants at least skimmed it and most read much of it aloud. However, they forgot what it said or did not read it closely enough, as many participants had questions by the end that were answered in that introductory informing content. This shows the limited effectiveness of a single point of communication, delivered all at once to the user. It is important to users to have answers to these questions, but those answers need to be delivered when questions arise, rather than in introductory text alone. The information that is most important should be delivered more than once, in more than one way.

### ***Response to Goal-Setting Model***

Most participants understood how intentions and actions related to each other: “An intention is ‘I’m going to join this race’... actions are ‘I better get some running shoes’” (P10). They also understood the intentions for their “fuzziness” which is what they are meant to be. (P13, P12)

Some understood intentions as being the equivalent of development goals: things an employee may want to do but which do not immediately relate to their project work. The intention is meant to encompass both instances; ideally a designer would be able to build skill in an area on a project team as well as through professional development activity. This shows that participants tried to make sense of the interface based on the goal framework they are familiar with, and the importance of proper onboarding and direction.

Participants understood that ‘projects’ referred to the active projects Kevin was working on, though a couple (two design managers) were not sure how projects connected to the intentions.

The research question for this topic questioned if this framework allowed for enough flexibility as a goal-setting model. However, it seems this test scenario was not able to answer that, and additional research would be needed to answer that question fully.

### ***Tracking Soft Skills***

Participants were stumped on how one might track soft skills. They agreed that they should be accounted for but were unsure how this should be done:

“Performance evaluations are often task-based: did you do this thing, did you take this class. But it’s not really quantifying delivery or quality of soft skills. I think that’s a really important question for you to explore, but I don’t have any answers for you about how to do that” (P11).

One participant suggested a conversation between designer and design manager could be a way to track soft skills, and two other participants suggested identifying intentions by whether they were soft skills or technical skills. Among other responses, there began to be some confusion between soft skills, technical skills, development goals and performance goals, though these are four separate concepts. A soft skill is generally related to how an employee works with others, while a technical skill refers to how one works with tools. A development goal refers to something an employee cannot do yet but wants to learn to do and a performance goal relates to the employee’s execution of job responsibilities. Development, performance, people skills and technical skills are all aspects of the performance management process but are simply different concepts.

The prototype tracks soft skills through the ‘related skills’ tags, similar to how user profiles are tagged with skills on LinkedIn. One participant imagined they would have a ‘skills profile’ that shows the skills they are working on, have worked on in the past, have been acknowledged for by others, or skills they want to know more about. The related skills taxonomy includes both soft and technical skills; a skills profile could show the different intentions they have worked toward in each topic over time. This could hypothetically show growth in, not only all skills but soft skills as well.

### ***Reflection Process***

**Response to segmented process.** Participants were positive about the flow of the process, and that this flow was an improvement over their current tool: “[the one we have] It’s not like a process, it’s just links that you click and go fill out like a form” (P14). Both designers

and design managers commented that the flow was smooth, sequential, and logical. This clarity may be thanks to the user interface design; two participants commented that they were watching the navigation elements to understand where they were in the process.

One participant mentioned they would rather work from the story view than to have the segmented process: “So you can edit from [this] screen. This is nice. I, honestly, I kind of feel like I would rather have just this screen and not the individual screens... if I hit edit, I just want to type in the field right there and not have to go somewhere else and break away from what I’m doing and thinking” (P12).

***Response to ‘Looking Forward.’*** A designer noted their current system did not have a section for collecting future goals and they felt that it should. Another participant initially mentioned that they were not expecting to see something about the future within the framing of a ‘reflection’ exercise, they eventually commented: “When I have my annual review with my designers, I always ask them... what do they want to do... either new places they want to explore, are there different tools they want to try... So I guess having a place where they can sort of preload that conversation a little bit, it's nice” (P12).

### ***Comparison to Portfolio***

When asked how the reflection process compared to the process of portfolio development, most participants said they were not alike at all. One participant commented that it is similar because it collected the same type of information they would use in their portfolio. Multiple participants said it was much different than portfolio development, either because there was a difference in purpose, a difference in scale, or a difference in the time it takes to create a portfolio.

### ***Experience of Entering Content***

An earlier hypothesis from the discovery interviews was validated in these interviews. I hypothesized that designers frame their evaluation responses with consideration for how their audience will digest the information; they employ their advanced skills to make the content more digestible. A quote from P15 confirms this: “Whenever I’m writing these things out, I always want to make sure that it’s easy to digest the information. So I kind of like to do lists as opposed to like one long paragraph.... Because I’m just a designer, I’m always thinking about whoever’s going to read this. And if it’s in a long paragraph, I feel like my eyes are going to glaze over” (P15).

The prototype has the user go through a series of screens where they can provide a response in a text input field (see Figure 2). This blank space was a little overwhelming to some participants; instead of providing flexibility, it apparently failed to provide enough structure. Interestingly, it was more the design managers that commented on this: two design managers and one designer. The two design managers commented on the difficulty with writing paragraphs: “The blank slate’s a little terrifying on these” (P12); “I think these are the hardest things to do, just to write a paragraph” (P14). One design manager provided some advice: “I would rather to see more help... maybe these questions should be separate, and they should help me to think through this process” (P14). The designer commented that their desire to be accurate levied a mental tax, and visually breaking out their answers for each question into paragraphs would ease that burden a bit. Two designers used the prototype to show in the interactive text input field that they would respond to the prompts by breaking the questions out within the text field, though only one commented that it would help ease stress.

In the initial sketches, questions on the Summary and Highlights screen were separated out, each with an individual text input field. In this second iteration of the prototype, they are combined into one text input in response to P9’s comment that employees may view it as just “more stuff to fill out.” This new feedback implies that the individual questions should be put back, more closely to the first iteration.

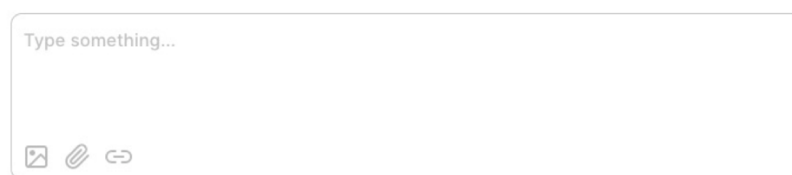
As with the initial sketches, there was positive response to the ability to add documentation to a response:

“Anything visual... anyone reviewing it, or even yourself, if you're going back in time and you're typing out how [you] improved, it's definitely great to hear about it. But I think visually, it might be more powerful to *see* the problem and then how you solved that in addition to writing about it” (P15).

Two participants suggested adding more traditional “what you see is what you get” (WYSIWYG) content editing tools to the input, so the user could format the content when adding it.

**What progress did you make on this intention?**

What were some challenges you faced, and how did you solve them?


*Figure 2.* Text input field.***What is Shared and What is Private***

The topic of privacy came up when viewing the front page of the portal. It has Kevin’s intentions along the top, and a social feed of his fellow design coworkers sharing their work. Interestingly, it was the design managers who commented on privacy concerns whereas designers had the opposite response and were excited and animated about the idea of seeing what others were working on as well as examples of their goals.

Designers were open to the idea of sharing goals and engaging on the social feed. They commented: “I would be so stoked [to see others’ goals] because it would make me more confident in my own assessment” (P11); “I always like to see what other people are looking to improve on because that might inspire me to, or, you know, give me reference of things that I can improve on as well” (P15).

One designer described how this aspect of sharing is an integral part of being a creative: “I think it's one of those things like, why don't we share our salary with each other? Actually, I think we should... But we've been kind of conditioned to think that that's like a private matter. I think with internal reviews, too, there's like this culture, this idea that it should be private. Personally, I'm a pretty open person. I think most designers are pretty open too — [it is a] pretty defining personality trait for creative people. So I bet that if it was set as like a standard or as an option, and especially if it could be anonymized, that a lot of people would be very open to that idea” (P11).

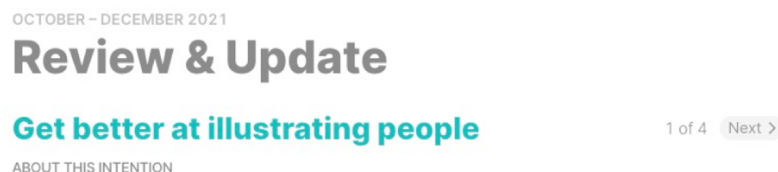
Alternatively, a design manager briefly questioned if Kevin’s intentions were viewable to everyone — pointing out that half the page is content relevant to the individual user, and the rest is a page where the user is sharing things as a team. Seeing these things co-located seemed to cause confusion. They commented that some people feel goals should be private, just between employee and manager. In response to the social feed, another design manager commented:

“Speaking personally, I would not want to share with a group most of the time... either my intentions and my progress against them, or even specific project updates. We have protect update meetings on a regular basis. I don't need to share on Tuesday, I worked on this PowerPoint. I don't want to share that. I don't think they need to know that. I don't want them to know that. Frankly, the less they know about what I do on a daily basis, probably the better. But ...I don't know if that's my personality or the work culture. But I don't think it [is] necessarily... a benefit that offers to anybody. It doesn't seem like it would be either a personal accountability push, or anything other than just snooping” (P12).

I would hypothesize that these contrasting feelings about sharing (work in progress, goals or sharing generally) amongst coworkers could be generational or possibly a reflection of office culture. It is true that openness is a key characteristic of many creative people. It is also true that designers traditionally do not like to be forced to do things. Ideally, the tool would provide the opportunity to share work but not require the audience to do so and thus allow the community to develop organically.

### ***Usability Issues***

**‘About this Intention’ link.** Five out of six participants overlooked the ‘About this Intention’ link (see Figure 3). It opens a modal window that shows a related skills tag, a description of the intention, and a definition of success. These elements would have been set up by the employee at a previous time. I had considered this information supplemental and less important, but participants, once they knew what content was behind the link, felt it should be given more prominence as these elements would be helpful to refresh on as they respond to the reflection questions. Participants suggested either putting the content from the modal on the intention page itself or increasing the visibility and interest of the ‘About this Intention’ text link.



*Figure 3.* ‘About this Intention’ link was too easy to overlook and did not provide a call to action.

**Incomplete navigational flow.** On the story view page, the user sees a consolidated version of all the content they have input over the previous pages. This view provides the ability to edit that content by linking directly back to the corresponding intention page. However, due to limitations of the prototype, once the user clicks back to an intention there is no easy way to get back to the story view to continue their final review. The prototype has a button to the story view on the Outline screen, but participants did not see this button. They suggested adding a link to the story view in the navigation along the top, having the intention data open in a modal window from the story view where you could edit within that, or just edit right there in the browser. Further testing could determine which solution to pursue.

**Confusion by interface labels with multiple meanings.** Two participants were confused by the word choice on the Reflection Outline screen (see Figure 4). Under the ‘Summary & Highlights’ header, there is a box or card with the word ‘Review’ inside it. This box changes color when the user hovers over it, indicating that it is interactive. These two participants seemed to read the word ‘review’ as a noun rather than the intended use — as a verb. This is understandable as ‘review’ is a common word to refer to a performance evaluation. A future iteration of the design should test a word that still indicates action needs to be taken, but a word that is not already in use within the topic of performance evaluations.

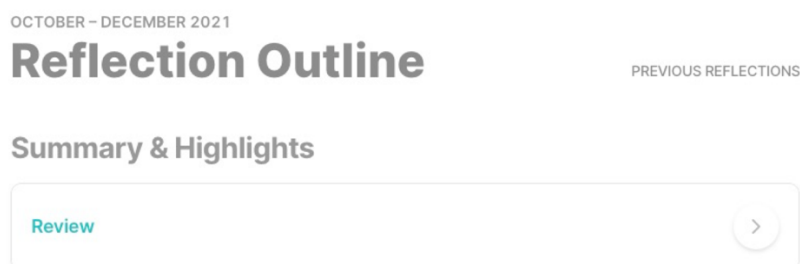


Figure 4. The ‘Review’ label was confusing to some.



## Chapter 7: Conclusion

I had several personal experiences that prompted me to explore this topic of performance evaluation of designers. One was an experience of a poorly executed performance evaluation where the conversation with my manager consisted of a ten-minute conversation about the weather. In the written evaluation I subsequently received, the pronouns were not correct, and it was clear the manager had simply copied and pasted what he had written for a fellow coworker.

In another experience, I went to fill out an evaluation and realized the growth plan I put in place for myself was not in line with that of the company. The evaluation forced me to put a spotlight on what I had achieved in certain areas, but they were not things that were part of my own view of good performance. The resulting evaluation looked like I was a poor employee, and this solidified my decision to leave that company.

The performance evaluation is a tool used by businesses to measure the performance of employees. For designers, this one-size-fits-all approach makes the experience irrelevant, ineffective, and potentially alienating.

In the course of this research project, academic research and discovery interviews led to a solid understanding of the problem. The user journey examined the different stages to understand the aspects of thinking, feeling, and doing that a tool needed to be able to support at each stage. Analyzing mindsets, mental models, and behaviors led to four behavioral archetypes representing four constellations of common designer needs for performance management. Through idea generation and design activities, an interactive prototype was designed and then tested with users. Many of the resulting hypotheses have now been validated and new insights were gained.

### Limitations of this Study

The number of participants in this research study was necessarily small. The in-depth methodology chosen for this study, with in-depth interviews, full-scale ideation activities, and building a rich prototype for usability testing, precluded a larger sample size. Within this constraint, however, care was taken to ensure that participants came from a range of company sizes and had ample levels of industry experience.

The complexity of the prototype required also limited the number of scenarios that could be supported. Time constraints on participant sessions precluded using participants' own data for the performance evaluation scenarios. And finally, the overall scale of the project made it

impractical to do iterative usability testing on the prototype and test the potential revisions suggested by the final testing.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

### ***Alternative Methods***

Firstly, a prototype that shows more specifically how projects are connected to actions and intentions should be explored to further understand how users may understand these two entities. This exploration of mental models could be done through a focus group, a design sprint, or any number of collaborative workshops. Another method that seems obvious to consider is performing a diary study with designers actually using the tool in order to analyze how people feel along the way and if they are more or less successful at fulfilling their intentions.

### ***Additional Topics***

Questions also remain about whether to bring portfolio development into performance management, and if so, how to do so. Interviews with designers and design managers could uncover more on this.

It would also be worth exploring what project management software offers, as it is a tool that already tracks and collects work. Perhaps additional features such as an opportunities for evaluation features could be combined with some project management software.

In-depth interviews with HR professionals should also be performed, to validate their requirements and ensure that organizational requirements for performance evaluations are successfully met.

Further research could explore how designers choose what goals to work towards, and whether planned accomplishments are more or less satisfying than unplanned accomplishments. Such exploration could guide potential scaffolding features in the performance evaluation tool that could support designers in their goal-setting.

Finally, it would also be useful to explore how age and gender might play into views of performance evaluation. Some research suggests that millennials and Gen-Zers have different views and expectations of work than previous generations. It would be interesting to look at whether views on performance evaluation persist across generations, and how any generational differences could be accommodated.

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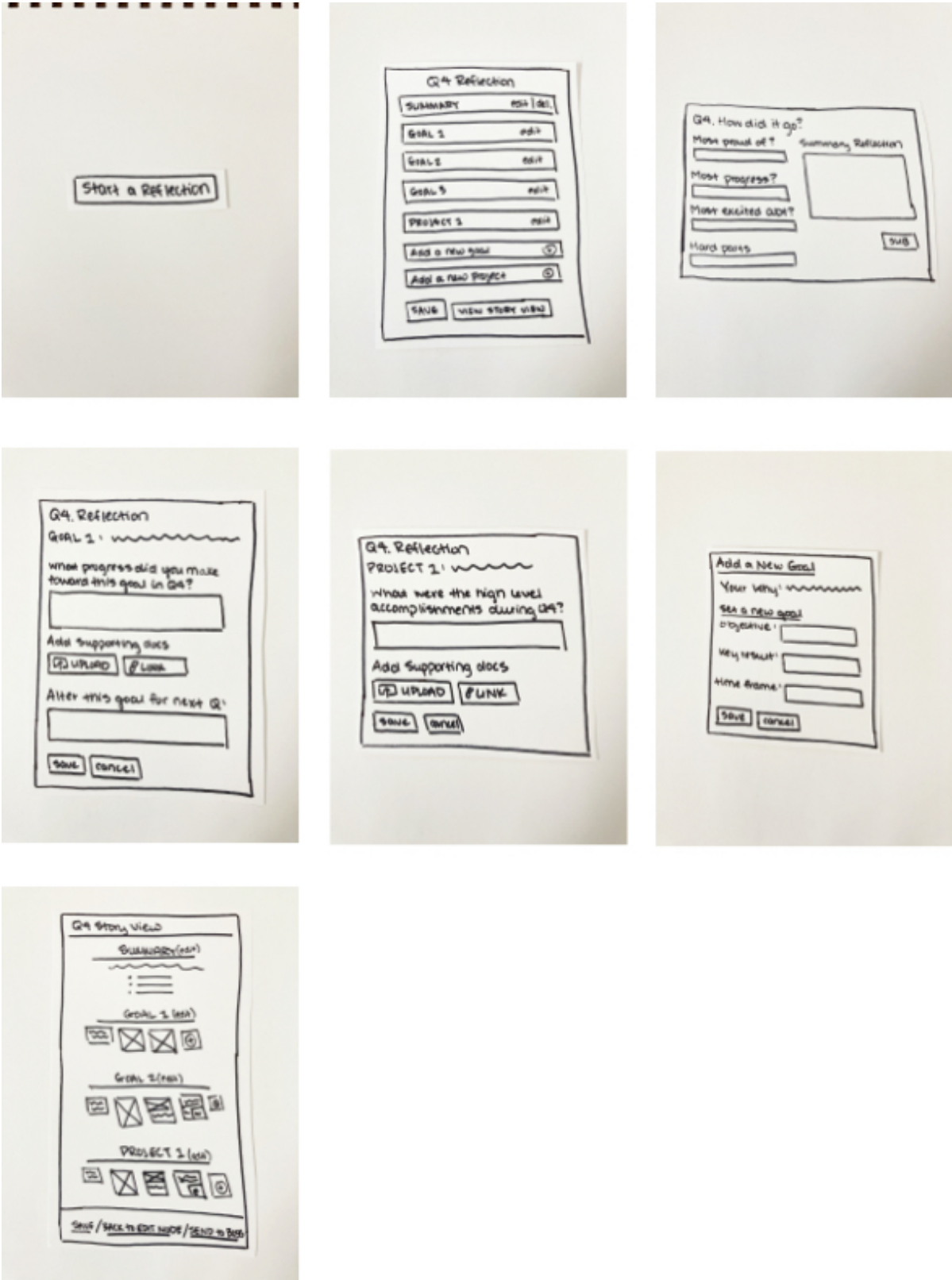
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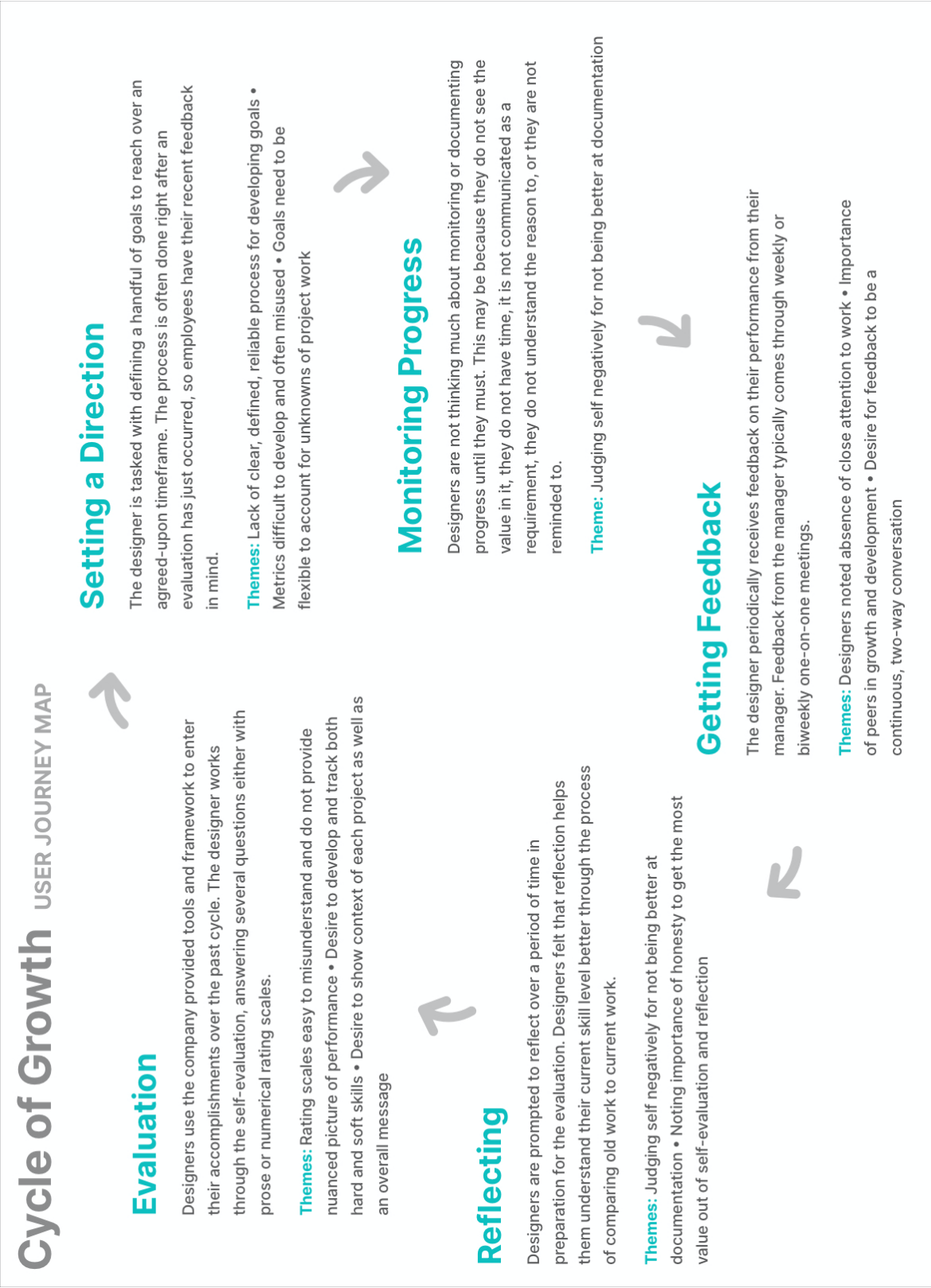
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Appendix A: Initial Sketches



Appendix B: User Journey Map





## Appendix C: The Achiever Archetype

## The Achiever

ANALYST

“

“I want to prove to the world that designers have ideas, and these prototypes that we build are what allows a design to get built in the first place. I don't think designers get enough credit for that kind of stuff.”

The Achiever understands the rules of the business world, but sees the unfairness of how traditional performance evaluations have been implemented. This archetype has a strong sense of self and knows that design brings great financial value to businesses.

### What do I want and why do I want it?

I'm savvy enough to know that design brings great financial value to businesses, and being recognized for that is important to me. To me, the primary value of the evaluation process is to get promoted or a bonus. These are ways the business can acknowledge my value.

### What gets in the way?

I'm frustrated by systems that do not have clear requirements or transparent processes. Since I'm expected to “play the game,” I need fair rules on how to succeed.

### Values

Accountability

Fairness

Success

### How do I currently complete my tasks?

I check in with my manager regularly, to communicate I am doing what I said I would do and maintain that accountability. When I complete the evaluation, I like to use my design skills to think of a creative way to respond to the ineffective format. I'll create extra documentation and submit it with my evaluation.

## Appendix D: The Sage Archetype

# The Sage

## ANALYST

“I’ve used a lot of bad performance management systems before. A lot of them were intended to be Human Resources (HR) systems that they would then go and try to customize. We need to think about how can we customize the HR system to the design role.”

### Values

- Supporting growth
- Customization
- Investing in quality systems

The Sage has a deep understanding of the different factors at play in the performance evaluation process. They have a wide variety of performance evaluation experiences, from highly structured systems to almost no structure. They see real potential in the exercise, but equally acknowledge how frequently the system falls short for designers.

### What do I want and why do I want it?

I want a well-thought out performance management system that is customizable to designers' needs. I know it can be beneficial if the company has invested in it and done it right.

### What gets in the way?

Companies that don't invest in a plan for is growth frustrating to me — whether that's business-wide growth or employee growth. If the business won't build up the process, it's up to me to create the structure for my team. This can be a big time investment and tricky when dealing with designers who come from many different backgrounds.

### How do I currently complete my tasks?

I have a formalized process for thinking about my goals; I bring in tips and tricks I've learned from the many previous places I've worked. I do a good amount of prep work before the evaluation meeting, and I come ready with a statement.

## Appendix E: The Maverick Archetype

# The Maverick

## ARTIST

“I think filling in spreadsheets and scaling people on one to five... people aren't numbers. I think its all crap.”

### Values

- Freedom
- Flexibility
- Creative thinking

The Maverick sees almost no value in the process of corporate performance evaluation and would prefer to start from scratch than to comply with the requirements. This archetype shows the bravery required to be a creative — they are unafraid to be different, unafraid of feedback, and unafraid to point out the ineffectiveness of the system.

### What do I want and why do I want it?

If we have to do evaluations at all, I want a system that gives me flexibility and doesn't treat me like a number. I want an honest, casual, ongoing conversation about where I can grow and where I stand out. I'm ready to have that conversation — I'm not afraid of feedback.

### What gets in the way?

I really dislike strict rules and rigid methods. The process for evaluation that exists now is based on irrelevant metrics which makes the process meaningless. I would even love to give input on how to change the system, and I have a lot of creative ideas but the company seems to have no interest in feedback on the system.

### How do I currently complete my tasks?

I try to get through the evaluation process while holding my nose — its really a pain. When I have the opportunity, I like to try thoughtful approaches to track progress of those that report to me.

## Appendix F: The Explorer Archetype

# The Explorer

ARTIST

“

“I constantly do a lot of self-reflection, especially when I wrap up a project. I try to think how I could have done it better and if I'm happy with the end result. I don't document these conversations or that reflection anywhere — I wish I was better at that. Its more stuff that lives in my thoughts, really.”

The Explorer is the closest to the traditional archetype of an artist, truly designing for the sake of creating. They are less focused on career advancement and instead are preoccupied with the enjoyment they get from project work. Though this archetype is internally focused, they appreciate quality feedback and thrive on the inspiration they get from others.

## What do I want and why do I want it?

I want to grow as a designer because I absolutely love what I do. I love being inspired and constantly learning to be a better designer. I want someone to look closely at my work and give me quality feedback.

## What gets in the way?

I'm not great at tracking things, and planning goals can be hard for me. I reflect a lot on how I could have done things better but don't usually document those reflections anywhere. What we're rated on in the evaluation now seems irrelevant, and that makes it hard to get value from the evaluation.

## How do I currently complete my tasks?

I do the evaluation like HR asks us to. I don't understand why they want things a certain way, so I just try to get whatever I can out of the process. I do the evaluation so I can get back to doing what I love: my project work.

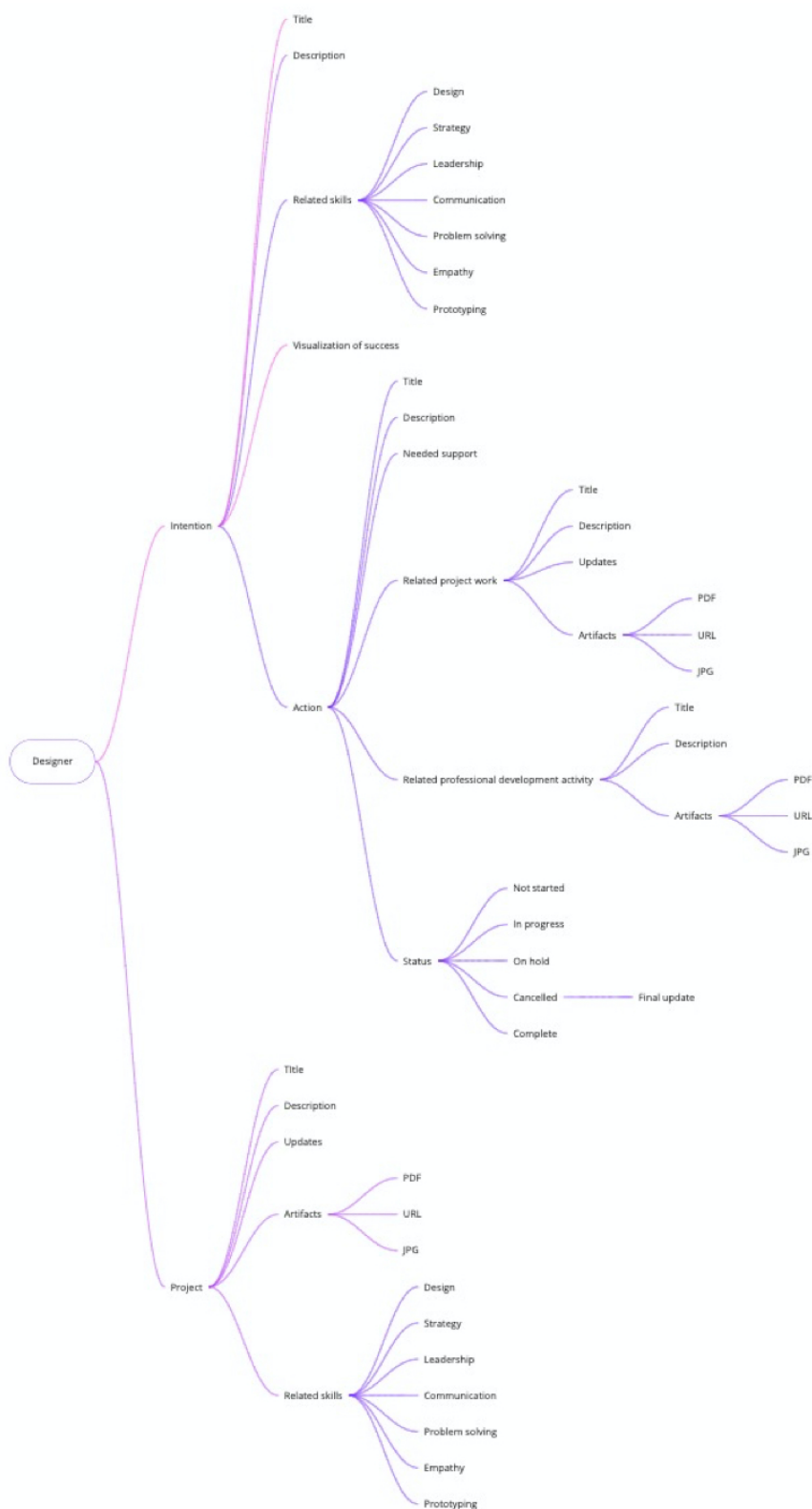
## Values

Inspiration

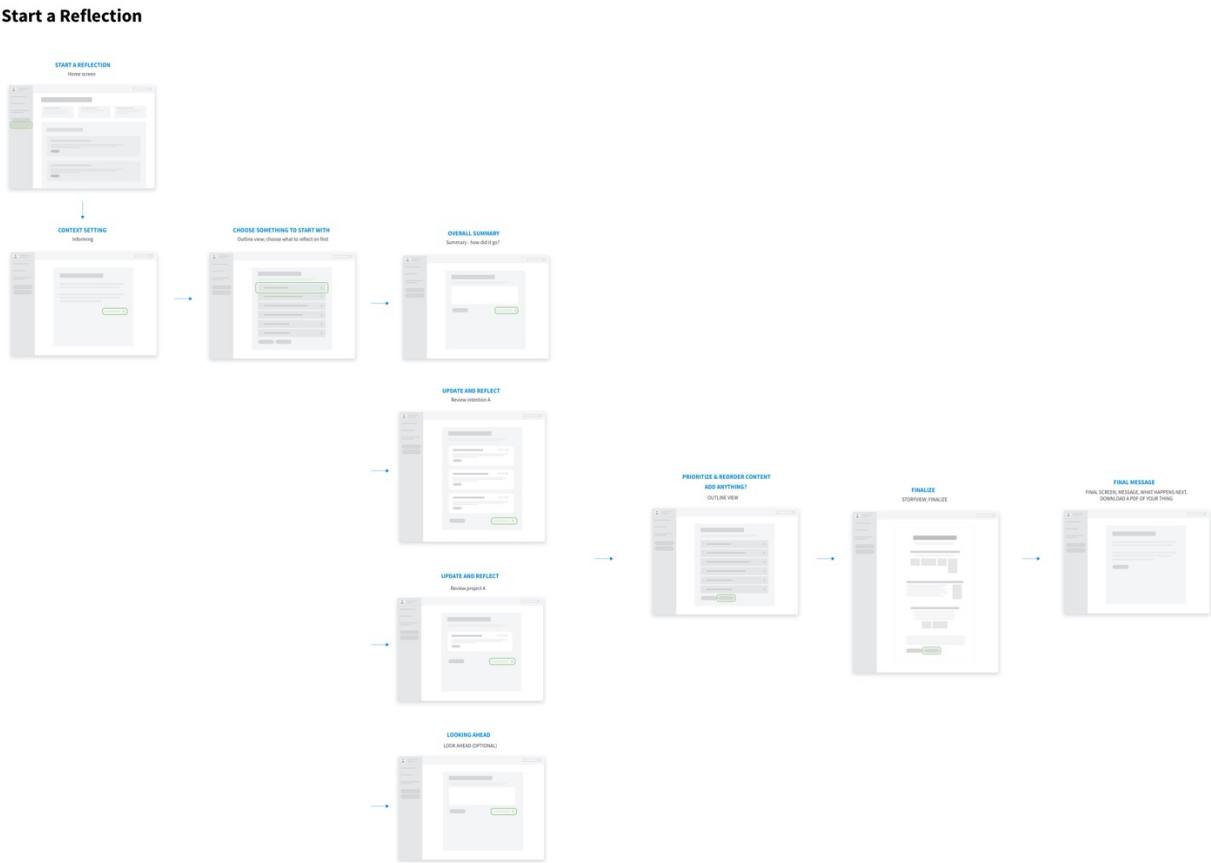
Honing craft

Quality feedback

## Appendix G: Content Model



Appendix H: User Flow



## Appendix I: Prototype

**Kevin's 2021 Intentions**

**INTENTION** Set better at illustrating people

**INTENTION** Improve presentation skills

**INTENTION** Learn more about design systems

**What did you work on today?**

Type something...

**Start**

**CDC Website Redesign Presentation**

Learn more about design systems and how to use it in your work. This document is a good starting point for your work.

**Start**

**Fall Reflection**

**A few notes before you begin**

The reflection process is a key part of your professional growth over the month of October - December, 2021. Please complete this process and submit it in your supervisor before January 31, 2022.

**Your answers go directly to your manager**

The reflection process is meant to help guide your discussion with your manager about your progress and success. The reflection process is a key part of your professional growth over the month of October - December, 2021. Please complete this process and submit it in your supervisor before January 31, 2022.

**A reflection takes about 1-2 hours**

Depending on how many reflections you can do at the beginning of the year, this process may take you more or less time. You can save your progress at any time and resume.

**Growth over perfection**

To get the most out of this process, the manager is intended to provide an overview and to guide you through the process. The purpose of this reflection during your supervisor time where they can support you.

**Start**

**Reflection Outline**

**Summary & Highlights**

**Review**

**Review & Update**

**INTENTION** Set better at illustrating people

**INTENTION** Improve presentation skills

**INTENTION** Learn more about design systems

**INTENTION** Improve illustration skills

**Looking Forward**

**Review**

**Start**

**Summary & Highlights**

**How did it go?**

Looking back on October - December 2021, what were some highlights for you? What are you most proud of? What challenges did you face?

Type something...

**Start**

**Review & Update**

**Get better at illustrating people**

**What progress did you make on this intention?**

What were some challenges you faced and how did you solve them?

Type something...

**What progress did you make on the actions to support this intention?**

Include more hand-drawn assets in client deliverables

Take a figure drawing class

**Start**

**Get better at illustrating people**

**Definition of Success**

Use more and more various, high-quality illustration elements in client deliverables.

**What progress did you make on the actions to support this intention?**

Include more hand-drawn assets in client deliverables

Take a figure drawing class

**Start**

