DESIGN
EXECUTIVE
COUNCIL

DESIGN EXECUTIVE OUTLOOK 2025:

The Role of Design Executives in the Enterprise AI Era

Featuring voices and data from 25 senior design executives, and impact stories from Adobe, Google, Cisco, and Oracle

Q1 2025

How are design executives in world's largest companies leading in the age of AI?

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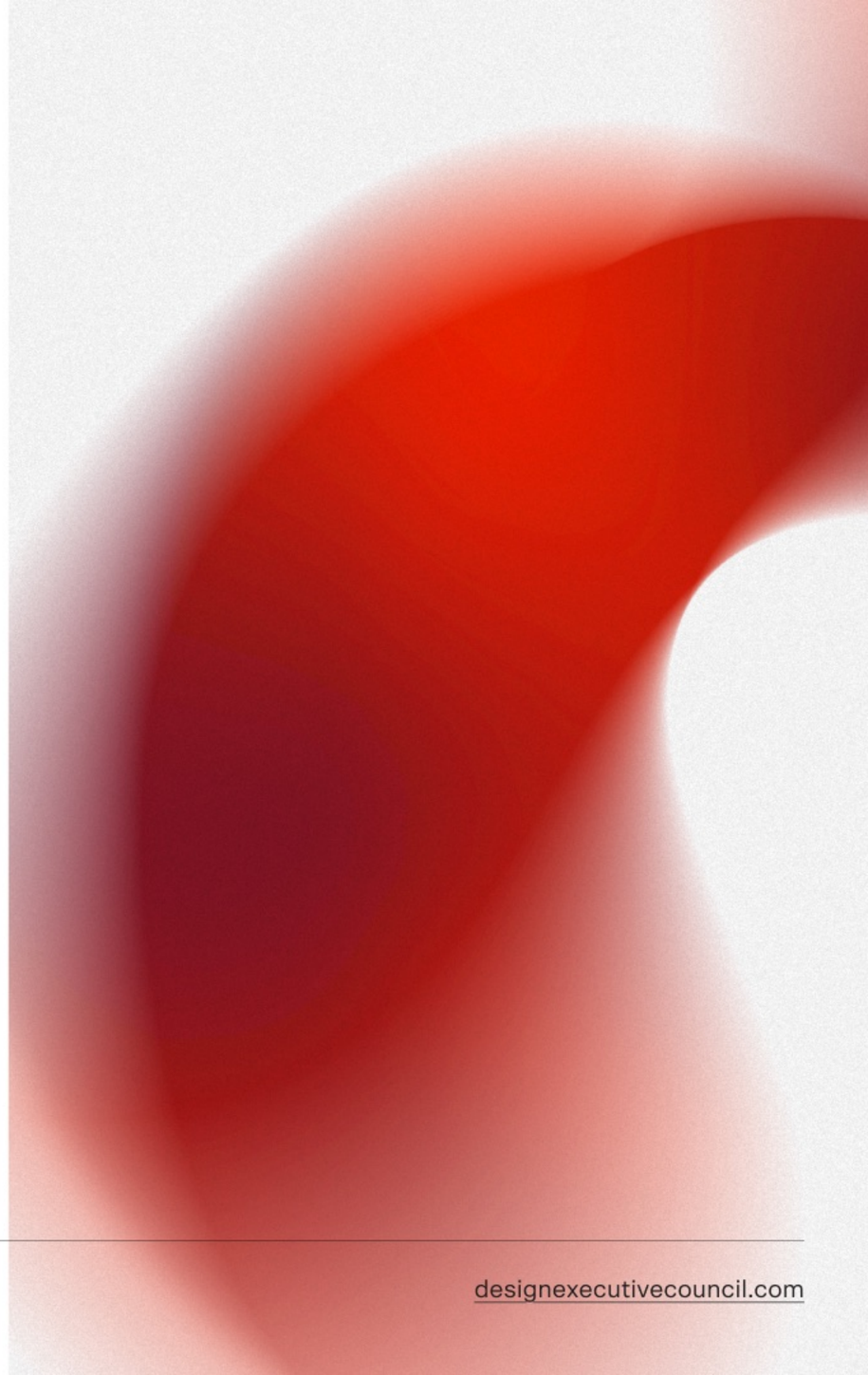
There are no conversations in business today without AI. It reflects the breadth and depth of its significance in how companies are reinventing and transforming.

According to PwC's 2025 CEO Survey, 45% of global CEOs believe their organizations will not be economically viable in a decade if they stay on their current path. The AI era is reshaping the playbook - creating new pressures and possibilities for reinvention at every level of the enterprise.

Design Executive Council 2025 data shows that 72% of design teams now shape GenAI roadmaps, and 68% of design executives influence strategy before delivery- a clear signal that design has moved upstream into business, technology and product strategy. Nearly half view AI as a transformational opportunity, not just a risk, underscoring a mindset shift from fear to strategic advantage.

This report draws from first-party data and impact stories from executives at Adobe, Oracle, Cisco, and Google to examine how design executives are shaping business, product, and workforce strategies with AI. It surfaces the questions, opportunities, and actions required to build more intelligent and human-centered enterprises - those positioned to realize a renaissance, not a reckoning.



DEMOGRAPHICS

Design Executive Outlook

How are design executives in global public companies leading in the age of AI?

Our report draws on 50 hours of executive roundtable discussions and a survey of 25 design executives - VPs, SVPs, and Chief Design Officers - from leading global public companies including Amazon, Delta, SAP, Target, Google, CBS, Oracle, JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo, and more.

Representing diverse industries and high-revenue organizations, their insights reveal how design executives are shaping enterprise AI strategy, innovation, and user experience at scale.

Annual company revenue

$100B+ — 32% of the participants

$50-$100B — 12% of the participants

$10-$50B — 16% of the participants

$1B-$10B — 28% of the participants

<$1B — 12% of the participants

Industry sectors

- Transportation
- Technology
- Media / Entertainment
- Retail
- Finance
- Healthcare
- Manufacturing

n=25 participants

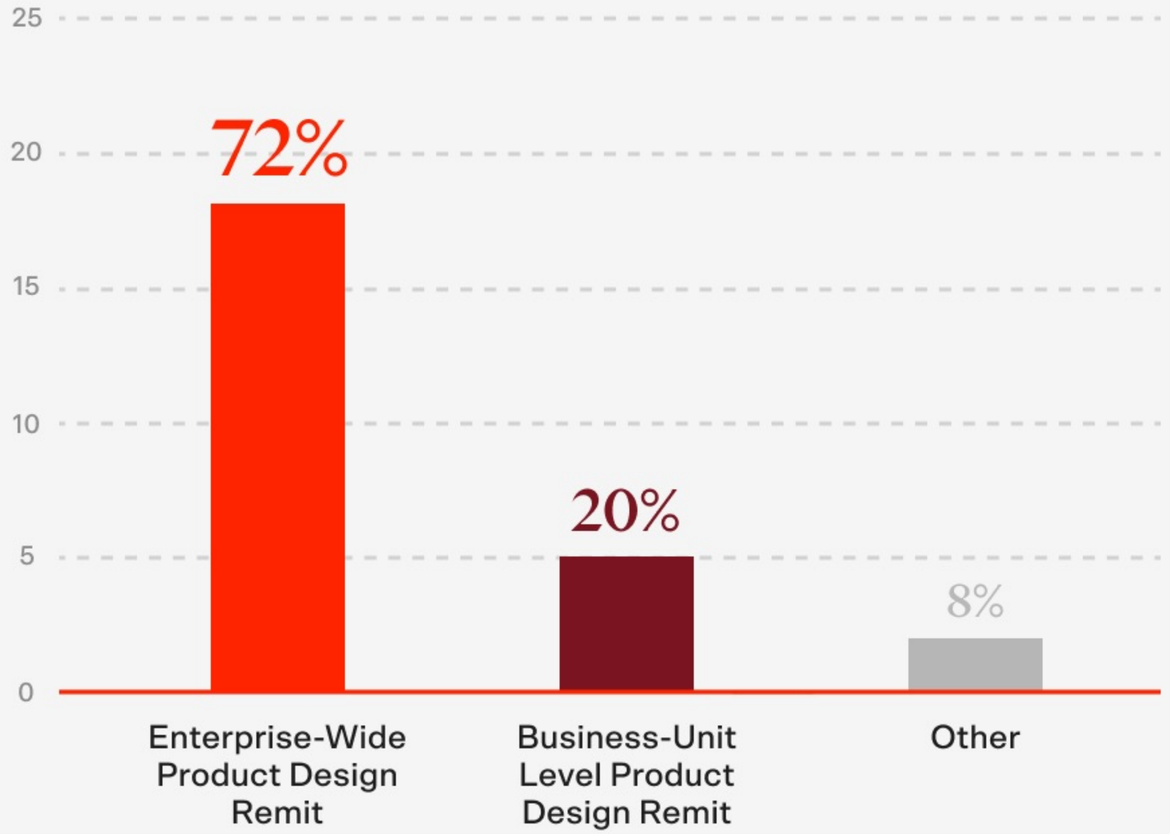
DESIGN EXECUTIVE SCOPE

When design executives speak on AI strategy, they're speaking with the authority of an enterprise-wide vantage point

The majority (72%) of design executives surveyed oversee product design across the entire company rather than within a single business unit.

This enterprise-wide remit gives them a unique vantage point to offer strategic perspectives the bridge the gap between strategy and execution in some of the world's largest companies.

Within your company, do you oversee product design across the enterprise, or within a line of business?



n=25 participants

Growing Influence of Design Leadership *in* Enterprise AI

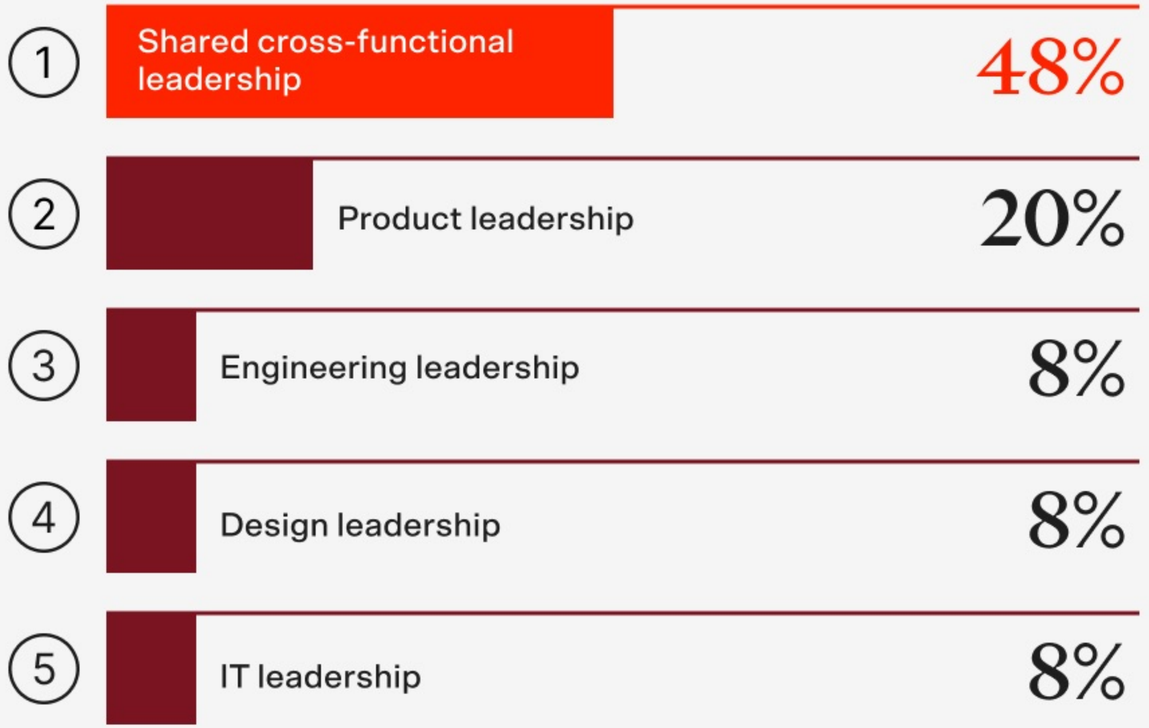
DECISION-MAKING INFLUENCE

GenAI adoption decisions have become a company-wide priority

Nearly half of the organizations (48%) report that decisions around GenAI adoption are now driven by shared, cross-functional leadership. Product leadership plays a strong role in one-fifth (20%) of companies, underscoring the importance of aligning GenAI with market opportunities and customer value.

This shift reflects how AI has moved beyond isolated initiatives into a **company-wide responsibility**, underscoring both its strategic weight and its growing complexity for global enterprises.

Who owns the decision-making process for adopting GenAI for your company's products/services?



n=25 participants

STRATEGIC POSITIONING

Influence of design executives in GenAI strategy is moving upstream

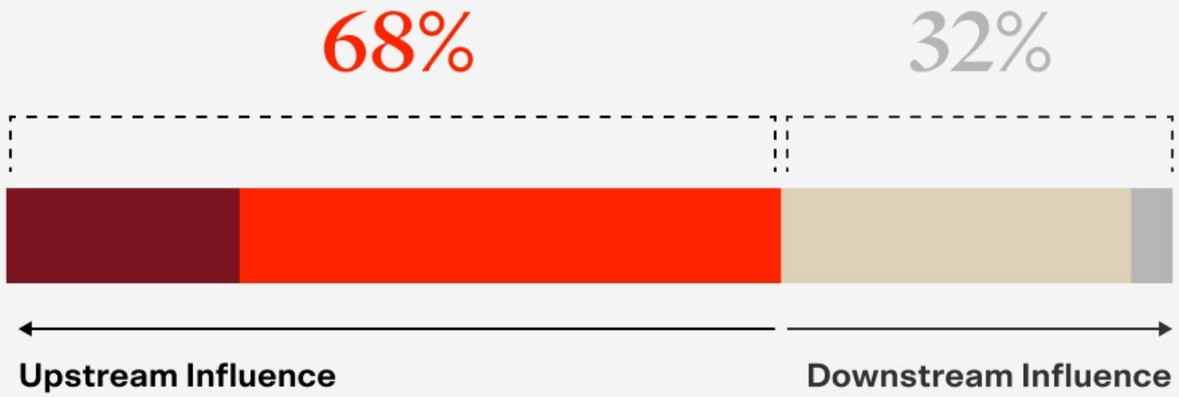
Today, 68% of design executives influence GenAI strategy before delivery, with 20% setting strategy and 48% shaping it through development and consultation.

This shift means **design leadership inputs are actively influencing strategic conversations that determine how AI impacts business decisions and the product roadmap,** further showcasing the upstream movement of design executives.

"For the first time, design is being pulled upstream in AI conversations."

Purvi Shah
VP of UX Design, Research & Accessibility
Target

Where are design executives positioned today in GenAI strategy decisions within their organization?



20%
Deciding and setting the strategy

48%
Developing and consulting on strategy

28%
Translating strategy into the product roadmap

4%
Executing and delivering on the roadmap

n=25 participants

INFLUENCE OF DESIGN TEAMS ON GENAI ROADMAPS

72% of design teams now shape GenAI roadmaps, a growing engine for strategic impact

Nearly three-quarters of design teams are now directly shaping GenAI roadmaps, signaling how design executives are extending their influence from vision into day-to-day product decisions. While only a minority currently hold full decision-making authority, the trend is clear: **design teams are increasingly setting requirements, guiding direction, and delivering execution.** This shift reflects both rising business demand for design leadership and the expanding capability of design teams to shape strategy, not just execution.

What is your overall design team's role in GenAI roadmap definition, development, and delivery?

Decision-Making Authority:
My design team has decision-making authority over roadmap requirements and priorities

Direct Involvement:
My design team is directly involved in setting the roadmap requirements and priorities

Consulting:
My design team is consulted on setting the roadmap requirements and priorities

Execution:
My design team executes on a predefined roadmap they are given

Level of Influence

n=25 participants

INFLUENCE LANDSCAPE

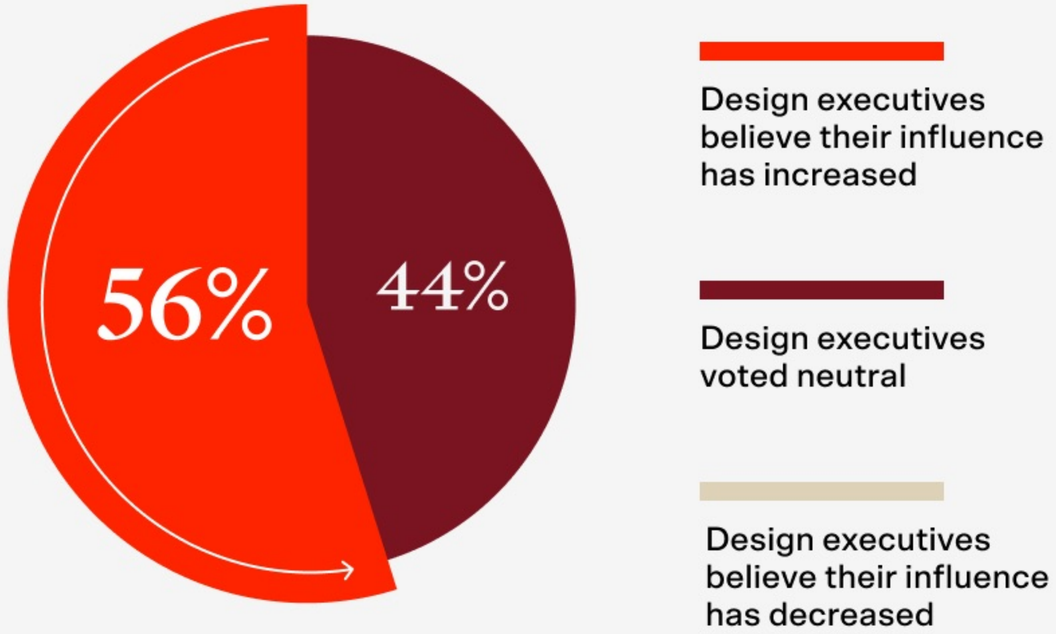
AI is expanding design executives' influence compared to traditional product roadmaps

This data stands as a trend indicator, confirming that design executives are gaining ground in the AI era. Over half (56%) report greater influence on AI and agentic roadmap decisions than on traditional product roadmaps.

The 40% who remain neutral represent untapped potential, evidence for shifting toward more collaborative and empowered decision-making.

No respondents shared that their influence over product roadmaps was decreasing, further reaffirming the notion of how **design is moving up the value chain.**

How has design executives' influence changed on GenAI or Agentic AI roadmap decisions compared to traditional product roadmap decisions?



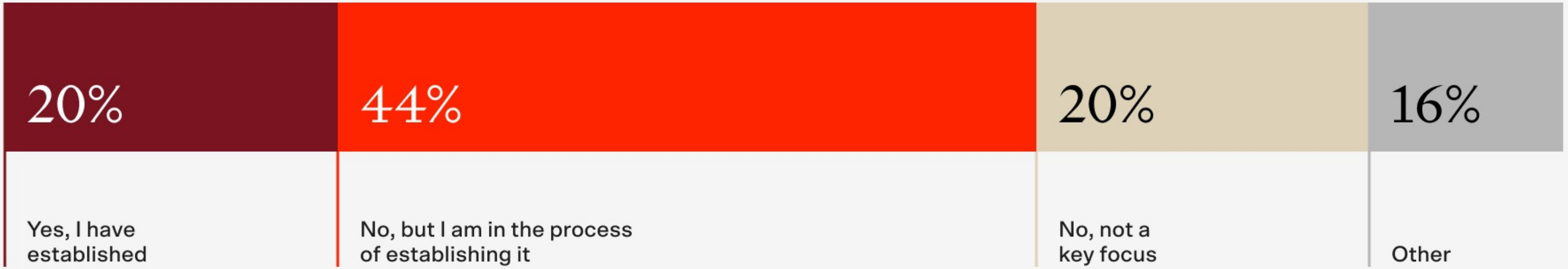
n=25 participants

METRICS

To shape strategy, design executives must know how to establish metrics that showcase measurable impact

Among the 20% of design executives with decision-making authority on GenAI strategy (referencing slide 8), only a small subset have fully established UX-specific AI metrics, showcasing the formative state of metrics evolving with AI. The majority (44%) are actively building these measures, indicating that the connection between strategy and measurement is emerging. This points to the critical relationship between design executives who set strategy, and their capability in establishing UX-metrics that link business outcomes and user experience.

Have you established UX-specific metrics tied to your company's GenAI strategy?



n=25 participants

AI LEADERSHIP READINESS

Building confidence and expertise in AI is a critical leadership imperative

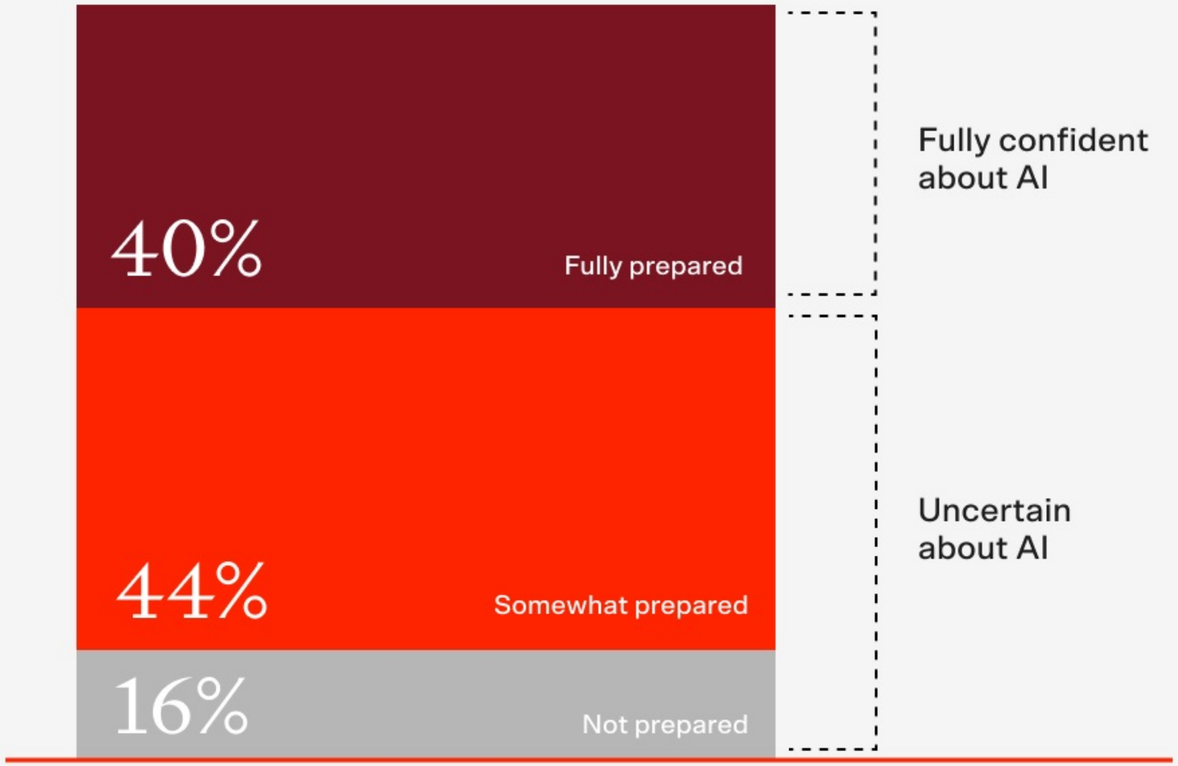
While 40% of design executives feel fully prepared to shape GenAI strategy, the majority view targeted up-skilling as essential to increase their readiness and impact.

AI is expanding the scope of design leadership, and this shift demands new design leaders to acquire AI literacy that best enables them to contribute uniquely to conversations around business models, workforce evolution, AI-era product development, and other key areas.

"Redefining our own roles as leaders in this age of transformation is really critical."

Janaki Kumar
Chief Design Officer, Global Banking
JPMorgan Chase

How prepared are you to debate perspectives and shape decisions with key partners in the AI era as a design executive?



n=25 participants

IMPACT ON BUSINESS

Design executives see AI as a catalyst, not just a risk to their business

The design executive community is increasingly framing AI as a business enabler rather than just a threat. Nearly half (48%) view it as a competitive advantage or transformational opportunity, with only 32% perceiving it primarily as a risk.

The remaining 20% hold a neutral stance, representing a valuable opportunity to shift more executives toward an innovation-focused mindset and unlock AI's full potential for value creation.

How significant do you perceive AI's impact on your company's existing business model?

n=25 participants

Closing Perspectives

What are your distinct contributions to AI conversations?

Design leaders operating upstream in strategy, what unique insights and contributions will you bring to business-level discussions? How are you advancing the quality of inputs and decisions?

How are you measuring UX to business value?

What signals or metrics are you using to connect customer experience directly to enterprise outcomes? How are you making design's influence visible, quantifiable, and understood at the business level?

What is your thesis for business competitive advantage?

As GenAI reshapes industries, what is your point of view on how design creates lasting differentiation? How are you framing AI not as a technology upgrade, but as a long-term engine of competitive advantage for the business?

TAKEAWAY

With AI imperatives, design executives are being invited to strategy conversations, but how will we sustain that influence?

WE BELIEVE THESE TO BE KEY DESIGN LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVES:

- Clarifying distinct strategic enterprise contributions
- Accelerating AI readiness and up-skilling
- Advancing metrics and visibility of design's impact
- Fostering team cultures of learning and adaptability

Design executive business impact stories of leading enterprise AI

EXAMPLE 1

Designing AI for Agency and Trust

How upstream design decisions on transparency, creative control and agency drove AI adoption.

Eric Snowden
SVP of Design
Adobe

EXAMPLE 2

Balancing AI Performance with User Trust

How design leadership added transparency and simple controls to AI ad campaigns, building trust and boosting adoption without reducing performance.

Suzanne Pellican
VP of Ads User Experience
Google

EXAMPLE 3

Turning Legacy Debt into Confident Decisions

Leveraging AI to untangle firewall rules, adding transparency and control for safer, faster, more proactive security operations.

Greg Petroff
Fmr. Chief Design Officer
Cisco Secure

EXAMPLE 4

Building Confidence in AI-Integrated Care

How integrating governance and risk-reduction measures into AI workflows improved safety, compliance, and adoption in healthcare.

Jennifer Darmour
VP of Health Design
Oracle

Adobe

EXAMPLE 1

Designing AI for Agency and Trust

Eric Snowden, SVP for Adobe, shared how AI is fundamentally reshaping how they design. Adobe's strategy focuses on ensuring AI enhances, rather than replacing, human creativity and control.

The Problem

AI risks diluting creativity and trust. While AI can produce generically beautiful outputs, it often lacks the precision and intent professionals need. Without transparency and control, autonomous systems risk eroding user trust.

There's growing concern that AI may normalize creativity, sidelining human taste and judgment, and that tech-led conversations are eclipsing critical dialogue around people, ethics, and society.

Adobe

The Solution

Adobe's AI approach centers on user agency, creative control, and human judgment, ensuring AI tools enhance, not override, professional workflows. By enabling precision, consent, and trust, Adobe positions AI as a creative partner, not a director.

Designing for Agency, Specificity, and Human Judgment

Prioritizing Control & Specificity: Adobe tools let creatives guide outputs with rough 3D models or reference structures, keeping their "hand on the wheel" and minimizing translation between vision and result.

Empowering User Choice: Users can opt-in or out of contributing content to Adobe's AI models, ensuring transparency and building trust through explicit consent.

Preserving Human Taste: Adobe emphasizes that AI can assist, but not replace, human judgment. Taste, intent, and knowing when something is "done" remain uniquely human roles.

Adobe

REFLECTION

Adobe's strategy reflects design's historic role: making technology human, ethical, and accessible. By prioritizing user agency, transparency, and control, Adobe builds trust, driving adoption, revenue, and loyalty.

This approach empowers professionals to create high-quality, specific outputs while reinforcing Adobe's position as a responsible AI leader.

The Result:

A clear competitive edge and a foundation for sustainable market leadership in the AI era.

Google

EXAMPLE 2

Balancing AI Performance with User Trust

Suzanne Pellican, VP of Ads Users insights on Google's Performance Max campaigns offer a crucial lesson in AI adoption: even when technology promises superior performance, **initial user trust, built through transparency, is paramount for widespread acceptance.**

The Problem

Google's Performance Max campaigns used AI to automate and optimize ad performance, delivering better results with less manual effort. Yet, adoption lagged. As Suzanne Pellican noted, **"better performance doesn't guarantee adoption".** The issue wasn't capability, it was trust and transparency.

Advertisers hesitated because they couldn't understand what the AI was doing, creating a confidence gap that slowed uptake of an otherwise superior product.

Google

The Solution

Google learned that performance alone doesn't drive adoption, users need to trust what AI is doing. By designing simple, strategic control points, they balanced automation with transparency, giving users confidence without compromising results.

Balancing AI Integration with Transparency and Control

Balance automation with transparency: Google shifted focus to not just delivering performance, but also making AI decisions more understandable to users.

Introduce meaningful control points: Instead of reverting to manual methods, the team designed strategic "knobs and dials", lightweight controls that preserved AI efficiency while restoring user confidence.

Build trust through design, not explanation: By embedding transparency and control into the user experience, Google addressed the trust gap without overwhelming users with technical complexity.

REFLECTION

The Google Performance Max example powerfully illustrates that while AI can solve complex problems and deliver significant value, initial user trust is non-negotiable. This trust is “earned” over time through clear communication about AI's operations.

As Generative AI tools grow more powerful, this balance remains essential: performance must go hand-in-hand with clarity and user empowerment for sustained success.

The Result:

A dynamic balance between performance, transparency, and user control is essential for successful AI integration and sustained value.

EXAMPLE 3

Turning Legacy Debt into Confident Decisions

"I love the idea of intractable problems, those truly difficult challenges that AI can now address. At Cisco, we developed an AI-integrated tool that analyzed hundreds of thousands of legacy firewall rules, enabling confident decision-making - which was previously impossible."
- Greg Petroff, former Chief Design Officer at Cisco Secure

The Problem

Cisco faced a significant challenge managing hundreds of thousands of firewall rules, some over a decade old and created by former employees.

This led to a reluctance to make changes due to uncertainty about their impact, a classic example of technical debt within complex legacy systems.

The Solution

To address the overwhelming complexity of managing legacy firewall rules, Cisco developed an AI-integrated analysis tool specifically designed to handle the scale, opacity, and risk of its aging infrastructure.

Solving “hard problems”

Impact Prediction: The AI could simulate how proposed rule changes would affect existing configurations, helping engineers forecast unintended consequences before deployment. This reduced fear of “breaking the system” and allowed for more proactive decision-making.

Rule Deprecation with Confidence: AI surfaced firewall rules that were redundant, obsolete, or unused, and flagged them for safe removal. What was previously untouchable due to institutional memory loss became visible and actionable.

Simplify Management: The AI automated the labor-intensive task of reviewing and maintaining firewall rules, replacing slow, error-prone manual checks with fast, consistent analysis. By streamlining operations, IT teams were freed from weeks of painstaking reviews, allowing them to focus on higher-value security strategy and innovation.

REFLECTION

AI can solve previously unmanageable problems, but success hinges on more than capability, it requires earned trust. Even with accurate insights, users won't act unless they understand how the AI works and why it's confident.

As AI tools take on more mission-critical decisions, explainability becomes a design imperative, not a nice-to-have. Trust must be designed into the system from the start.

The Result:

Trust, explainability, and human-centered design are essential for deploying AI in complex, high-stakes environments, especially when decisions carry real-world consequences.

EXAMPLE 4

Building Confidence in AI-Integrated Care

Jennifer Darmour, VP of Health Design at Oracle Health, recognized early that true AI integration couldn't be an afterthought, especially in a tightly regulated industry like healthcare. As Oracle acquired Cerner and began unifying over 400 healthcare products, AI emerged as both a significant opportunity and a potential risk. While many teams initially approached AI as a “sidecar” add-on, Jennifer led a shift toward re-architecting systems from the ground up, embedding risk reduction strategies, regulatory alignment, and user trust directly into the product development process.

The Problem

A team of highly skilled engineers, working under tight timelines and unfamiliar with healthcare regulations, unintentionally bypassed key compliance steps. As a result, the product was later classified as a medical device, triggering a two-year FDA review.

The experience led to significant delays and served as a powerful reminder of the critical role compliance plays in regulated industries, where even small missteps can carry a high cost.

ORACLE

The Solution

To ensure responsible AI development, and faced with the high stakes of AI in healthcare, Oracle's design team proactive approach to integrate risk reduction and design principles directly into Oracle's regulatory workflow, turning compliance into a mechanism for trust and accountability.

Embedding Risks Through Process, Not Pushback

Saw the risk early: As Oracle transitioned into healthcare, the design team recognized the high stakes of getting AI right from the start. Acting early was essential to avoid costly compliance missteps.

Claimed early influence: Instead of waiting for permission, design embedded itself into foundational AI work. This secured a true seat at the table for architectural decisions.

Leveraged regulation as a wedge: The team partnered with regulatory to embed ethics and design principles into mandatory processes. This made ethical review a built-in part of how products ship.

REFLECTION

In regulated industries, compliance must be designed in, not retrofitted. Design can play a powerful role in governance and operational excellence by creating systems that protect users, reduce risk, and create AI adoption that is trustworthy and meets compliance requirements.

Oracle's design team earned lasting influence, not by asking, but by architecting it. By embedding compliance into regulatory workflows, they secured a structural role in how AI gets built, ensuring every product aligns with user safety, compliance, and responsible innovation from the start.

The Result:

Design can shape not just experience, but operational excellence and governance at scale.

Request a research briefing:

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DXC provides executive membership, strategic advisory and research to global enterprises looking to unlock the value of strategic design leadership. Connect with us to learn more or explore ways to connect with our Council.

Contributors

Thank you to our members and contributors for shaping bold perspectives on the evolving nature of GenAI, and the critical role design has in driving business success in a world with AI.

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Advancing the strategic role of design leadership in global business

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