

# How Intercom designers have impact

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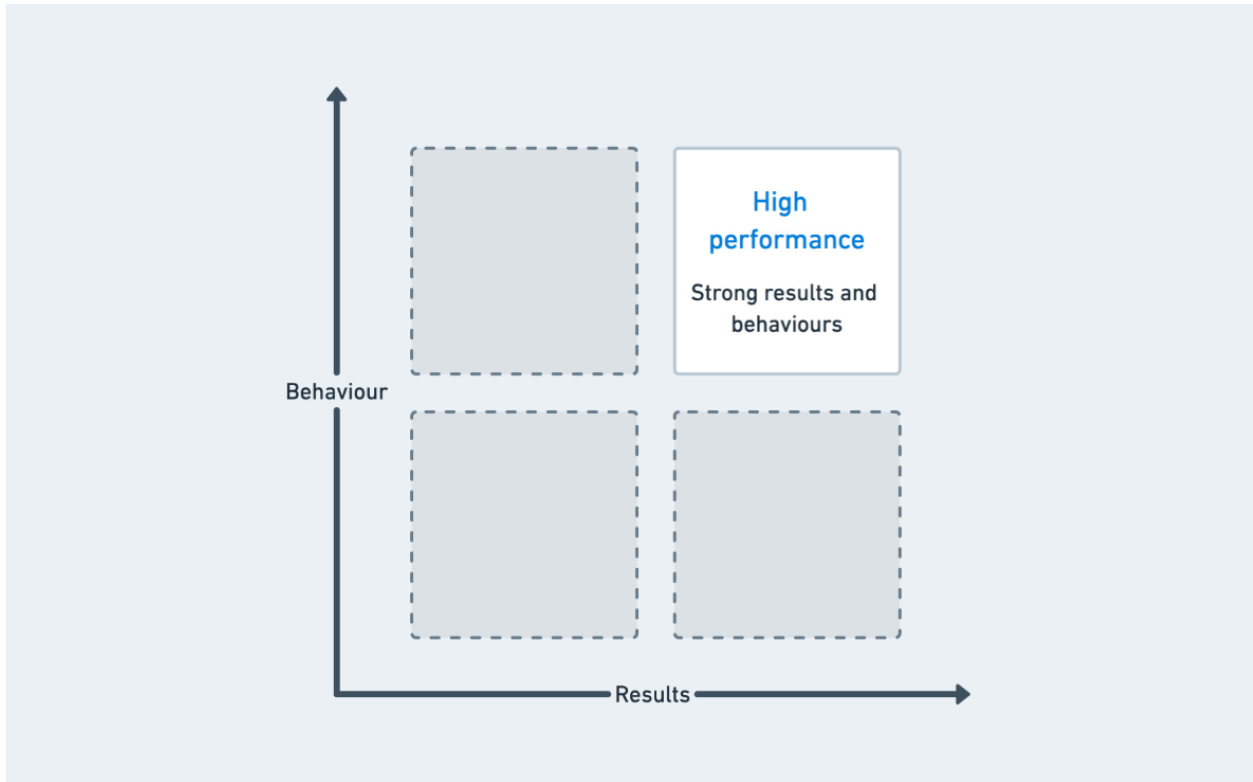
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The **goal** of this doc is to clarify how to think about impact as it relates to product and content design. The **approach** taken is to explain, in a simple and concise way, using visuals and examples where possible, Intercom’s philosophy on having impact as a designer. A good **outcome** is that managers and designers use this doc to align on what high impact looks like and how to achieve it.

## What does having impact as a designer mean?

Before we talk about impact, let’s zoom out and talk about **performance** more broadly. Performance is measured on two axes: **behaviour** and **results**.



Behaviours are assessed based on your ability to successfully **work with others** and on your demonstration of **leadership** in your role.

Successfully working with others means:

- You commit to doing things and then follow through
- You bring people from multiple disciplines together to drive projects forward
- You are organized, methodical and precise
- You constantly search for opportunities to be impactful
- Your communication is articulate and compelling
- You are all-in and a team player
- You learn, understand, and live the Things We Value and our [R&D Principles](#)

Leadership can be demonstrated through:

- **Project leadership:** For example, conceptualizing and realizing new and innovative product ideas
- **Team leadership:** For example, upleveling the design org's processes through DesignOps

- **Thought leadership:** For example, sharing knowledge and ideas around emerging concepts like bots and automation to help teams understand the space and build better product

For more on behaviours, see [The recipe for developing your career as a product designer](#).

Results are assessed based on the **quality** of your work and the **impact** of your work. High quality design work is:

- **Valuable** to customers and solves the intended problem
- **Easy to use** and understandable
- **Well crafted** and polished

High impact design work:

- **Contributes tangibly** to hitting team or company goals
- **Gets recognised** broadly as being valuable
- Drives positive **change**

Quality and impact are **connected**. Consider this: If a designer believes their work to be high quality, but the work is not high impact, then can it *truly* be said to be high quality?

We believe that the answer to this is **no**. This is because for a design to be high quality it must solve the intended problem, and we should only work on problems that are impactful to solve, so therefore for a design to be high quality, it must also be high impact. Doing high impact design work is **central** to being a high performing designer.



## How can designers have impact?

There are three types of work that a designer commonly does:

- **Product work:** For example, designing a new feature, like Custom Bots.
- **Process work:** For example, contributing to our team guidelines, like our [Principles](#).
- **People work:** For example, supporting a teammate, like by providing mentoring or giving feedback.

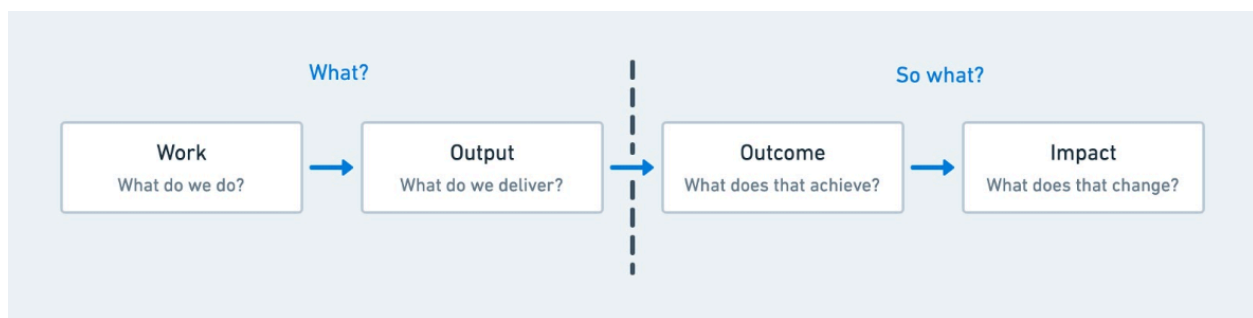
Regardless of the type of work, all work results in:

- **An output:** This is the work that's delivered.
- **An outcome:** This is what the work *achieves*.
- **An impact:** This is *what changes* as a result of the work.

As a designer, it's important to be able to draw a connection between **the work** that you do (the “*what?*”) and **the impact** of that work (the “*so what?*”). This ensures that you've made a meaningful and positive **change**.

Why is this important? Firstly, because it helps designers to clearly **demonstrate their impact**, but also because it's a core part of **how we build**. The objective of [our close out phase](#) is to evaluate the results of our work to confirm if the problem has been solved.

All of this can be translated into a simple **framework** (based on the [Kellogg model](#)):



Let's apply this framework to examples that illustrate just a few of the ways that designers can have impact:

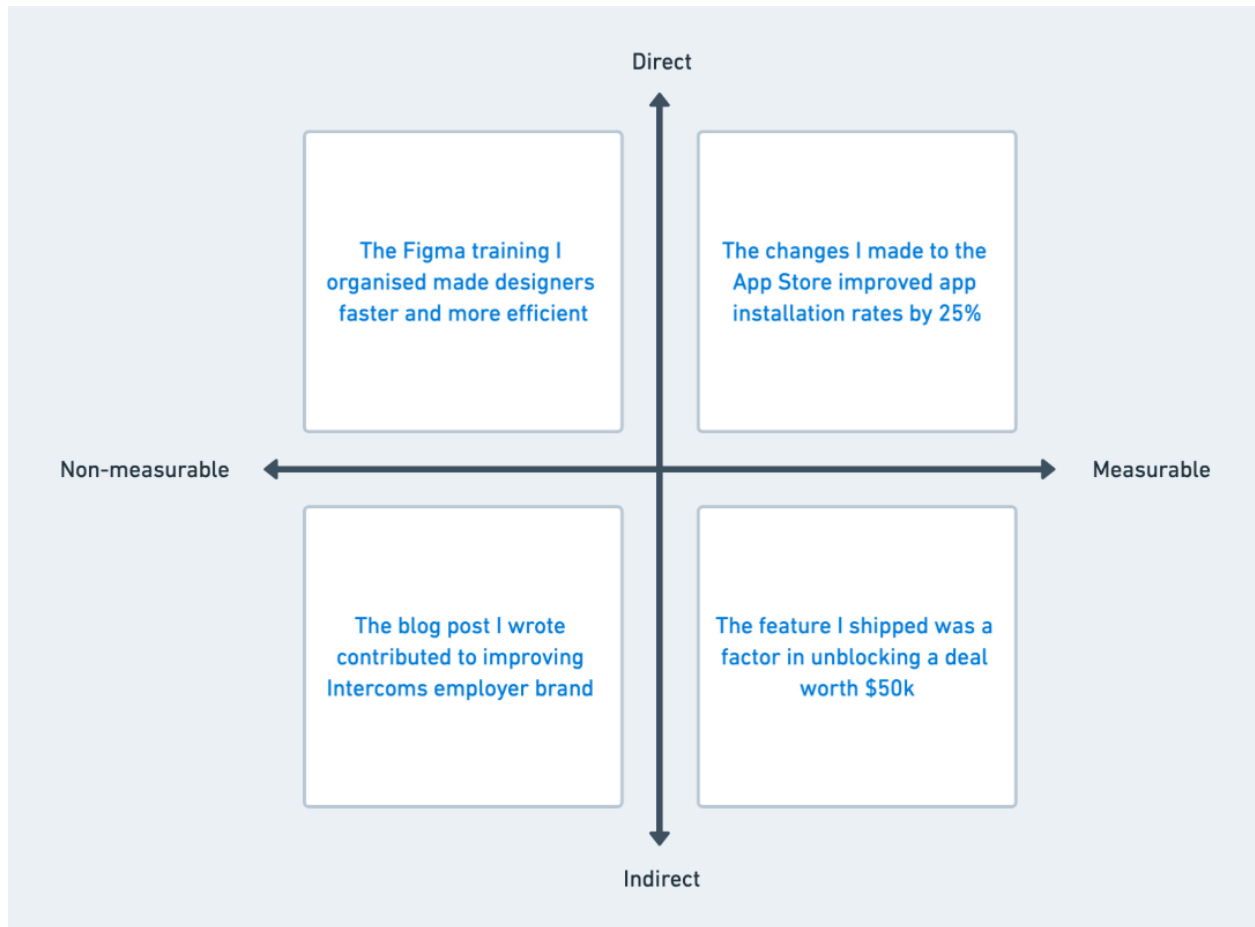
What?	So what?
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Work	Output	Outcome	Impact
Designed a high quality solution to a known customer problem, drove project progress, shipped it in high quality	A new feature in Intercom	A top problem to be solved for the team is now closed out and the feature is delivering value to customers	The new feature was a factor in unblocking a sales deal with a strategically important company worth \$50k in revenue
After instrumentation showed that a recently shipped design had not improved target metrics, partnered with PM to identify the root cause by talking to customers, then drove the team to fast follow with a further iteration	Iteration on a new feature in Intercom	Target success criteria met, problem is confirmed as being solved and project is closed out	Customers receiving value from a feature that would have otherwise have failed
Autonomously conducted a design review of the App Store, identified a number of quick wins, worked with the team to ship improvements during wiggle week	Changes to the App Store	A number of problems and opportunities that would otherwise have gone unidentified have been addressed and team KPIs have improved as a result	App installation rates have improved by 25%
Organised Figma training for designers	A series of lunch and learns	Designers are upskilled in using Figma's advanced features	Designers now produce mockups more quickly and efficiently
Wrote a blog post on design culture at Intercom	Blog post published	Blog post is shared widely on Twitter and generates a lot of engagement from the design community	Intercoms employer brand is improved and becomes a more attractive place for designers to work
Gave high quality design feedback during crit, which identified a problem with a design and proposed a good alternative solution	Iteration on the presented design	Design is improved and the team can move forward	The presenter learns and gets better as a result

## How can a designer understand their level of impact?

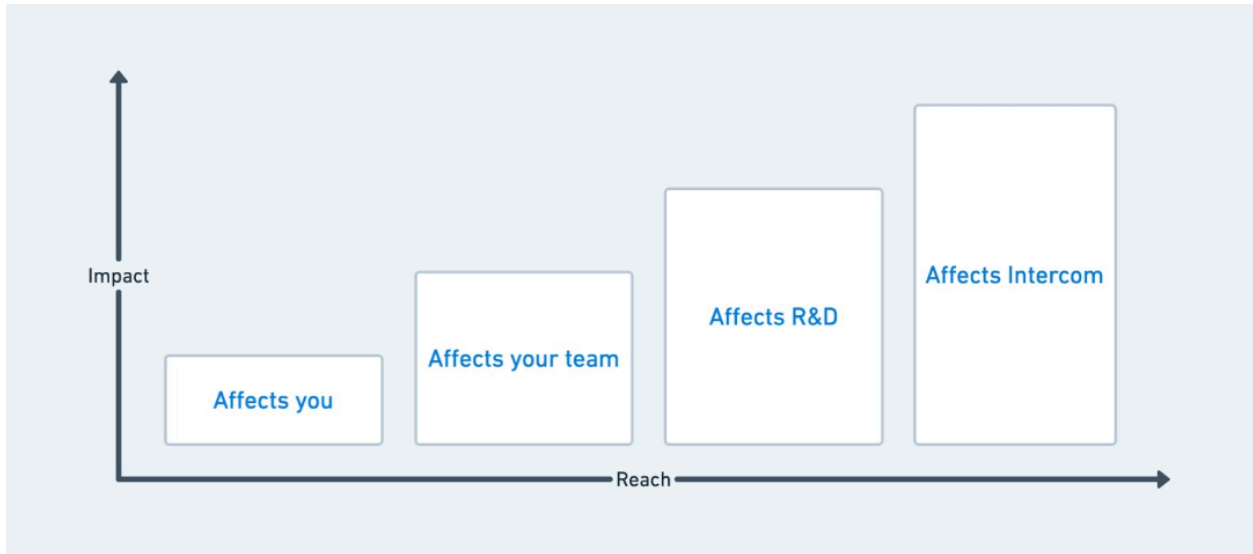
Impact can be:

- **Measurable:** A numerical value can be placed on the work
- **Non-measurable:** The work has value that is non-numerical
- **Direct:** The value can be unambiguously traced back to the work
- **Indirect:** The work has value that's not easily traceable



As such, assessing the **level** of impact of work (and comparing the level of impact across different work) is difficult. This is especially true in cases of non-measurable or indirect impact. This doesn't mean that this work is less valuable, it just means that it's **hard to quantify**.

A general principle is: "the farther the reach, the greater the impact." So work that affects the wider business usually has a greater level of impact than work that affects just one person.



An important thing to note: we expect impact to increase with seniority, so the expectations for an associate designer to have broad reach are not the same as for a principal designer. Regardless, all designers should search for opportunities to **amplify their impact** by broadening the reach of their work. This can be done by **starting small** with a piece of work, then gradually increasing its impact over time by broadening its reach.

Here's an example:

Affects you	Affects your team	Affects R&D	Affects Intercom
Learned how to set up a dev environment so I can ship fixes to UI bugs.	Ran a workshop to teach other designers in my office how to set up a dev environment so they can ship fixes to UI bugs, too.	Collaborated with engineering to build a simplified dev environment for designers and rolled it out across all of R&D. Now designers in all teams regularly commit code as part of the design process.	Partnered with leadership in Sales, CS and R&D to initiate a Product Quality Program which focuses on fixing previously under prioritised product quality issues raised by high value customers.

As you can see, assessing impact is nuanced. The number of factors involved means that there isn't a quick answer to the question of *"How can a designer understand the level of impact of their work?"*

The **most important** thing you can do to understand your level of impact is to regularly **talk to your manager** and ensure you're both **aligned**. A good exercise is to ask yourself these questions:

- Am I working on the most impactful thing?
- How can I be more impactful?
- How can I broaden the reach of my work?

Try asking your manager the same questions—are your answers the same as theirs? What needs to change for you to be fully aligned?

## Does working on a particular team affect the level of impact that a designer can have?

When assessing performance, the impact of the **individual** is evaluated, not the impact of the team they're on.

This is important because some teams take on more high profile projects than others, but any designer on any team has **the same opportunity** to be as **individually impactful** as any other.

Here are some **example scenarios**:

- Team A spent the quarter working on a company goal of shipping an entirely new product which resulted in a successful, high priority launch. However, the designer on this team struggled to drive the project forward and missed many goals along the way.
- Team B spent the quarter solving for several necessary (but not highly visible) feature gaps in their product. But the designer on this team influenced the team's roadmap, made the team faster, raised the quality bar, and drove projects forward.

Based on these scenarios, we'd determine that the designer in Team B was **more individually impactful** than the designer in Team A, despite working on a lower profile project.

While it's important not to conflate individual impact and team impact, there's some correlation between the two. A designer who's highly individually impactful will commonly raise the level of impact of their team. This is what we call being a **force multiplier** and is a strong signal of a high performing designer.



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