designing for agentic systems

Redefining experiences in the age of autonomous agents

shelley evenson for Mdes Frameworks class 9.24.25

Background artist Marco Maggi

“The AI model that you’re using today is the worst model that you’ll ever use for the rest of your life.”

Kevin Weil
Chief product officer at OpenAI

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designing for agentic systems

what are agentic systems?

is designing different?

designing for trust

discussion

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What are agentic systems?

Agentic Systems are made up of autonomous agents that continuously perceive, reason, act, and learn.

They use information from sensors, APIs, databases, or human inputs, and analyze it, establish goals, and finally assess various potential actions.

They can solve complex multi-step tasks, monitor progress, and have the potential to operate independently without constant human oversight.

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How do agentic systems differ from plain old generative AI?

	Generative AI	Agentic AI
Primary function	Content creation and sequential task completion	Goal-oriented orchestration, proactive decision-making and execution
Core foundation	Large language models (LLMs)	LLMs as the “brain” to guide the flow of an application with varying degrees of autonomy
How humans drive	Prompting and editing content	Collaborate on goal-setting and provide system oversight
Examples	Drafting ad copy alternatives from a prompt	Collaborating on planning and executing a marketing campaign

agents can maintain context and memory

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We’re on the verge of an agent economy

“An agent economy is one in which agents don't just communicate information they transfer resources; they can make transactions and keep track of each other”.

Konstantine Buhler | AI Assent 2025
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLOhHNjZItNnMEqGLRWkKjaMcdSJptkR08&si=hZN7Fp5cynUJz3_g

Inference

INFERENCE ESSAYS

The Agent Economy: Building the Foundations for an AI-Powered Future

AI Agents will enable significant leverage for individuals and companies, but what are the technical developments needed to get there?

MAY 14, 2025

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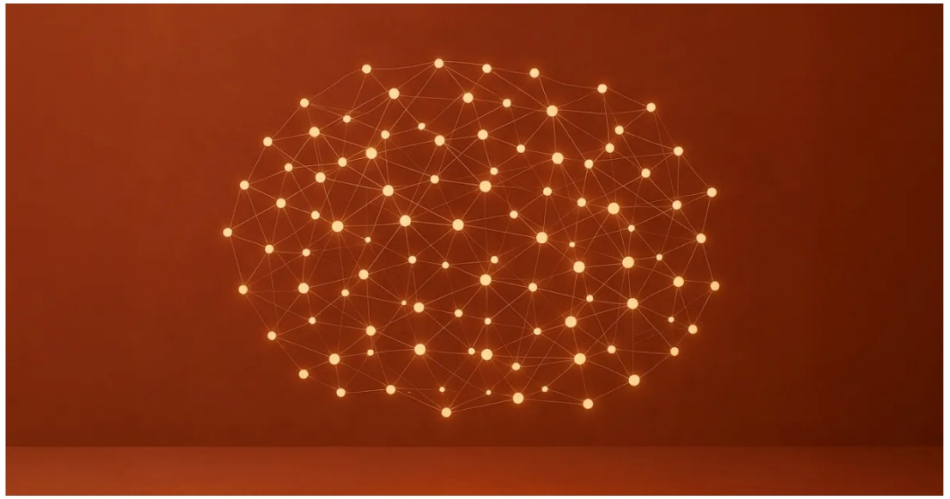
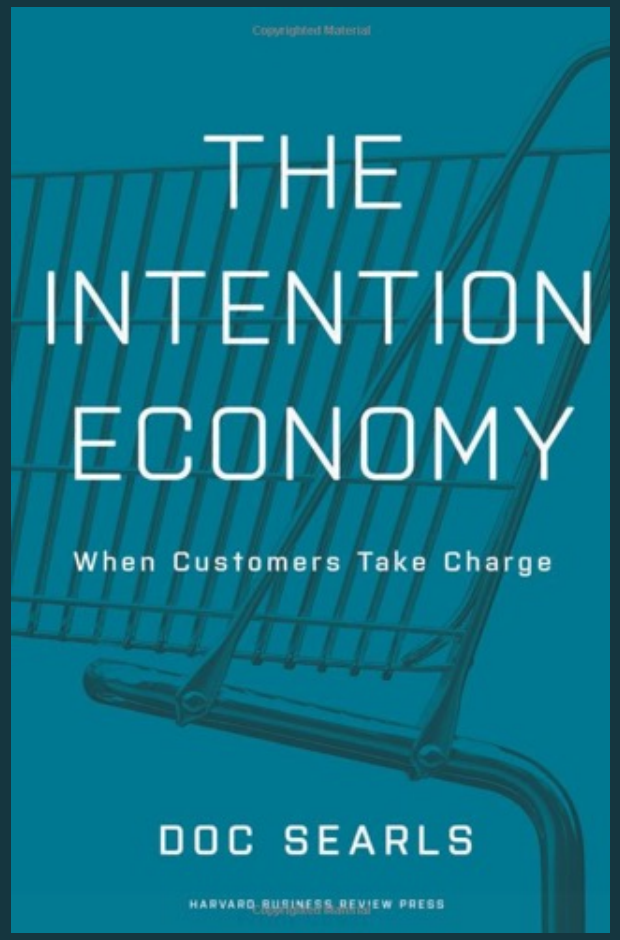


Post methodology: @Gemini 2.5 Deep Research: *Please research the building blocks of the agent economy as identified by Konstantine Buhler, partner at Sequoia Capital. He believes that the agent economy requires: 1. Persistent Identity; 2. Seamless Communication Protocols; 3. Security and Trust. please show the current state of research on each of these points as it refers to AI Agents*; @claude-3.7 via Dust: *Can you turn this deep research report into a more concise 2000 word essay that describes Konstantine's thesis and then talks about the technical developments needed to get there. although the hurdles are significant, the overall tone should be cautiously optimistic.* Light editing and formatting for the Substack platform.

Did the Intention economy take a slightly different turn?

Last week Google announced a new protocol for agentic payments called Agents Payment Protocol, or AP2. Users codify their intent mandate (intent casting?) such as asking for white running shoes and the agent would return with a shopping cart containing a pair of shoes which the user signs off on using a cart mandate for delegated operation.



May 1st, 2012

…is it a “purchasing” digital twin of the user?

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Everyday people (all of us) will become agent managers…

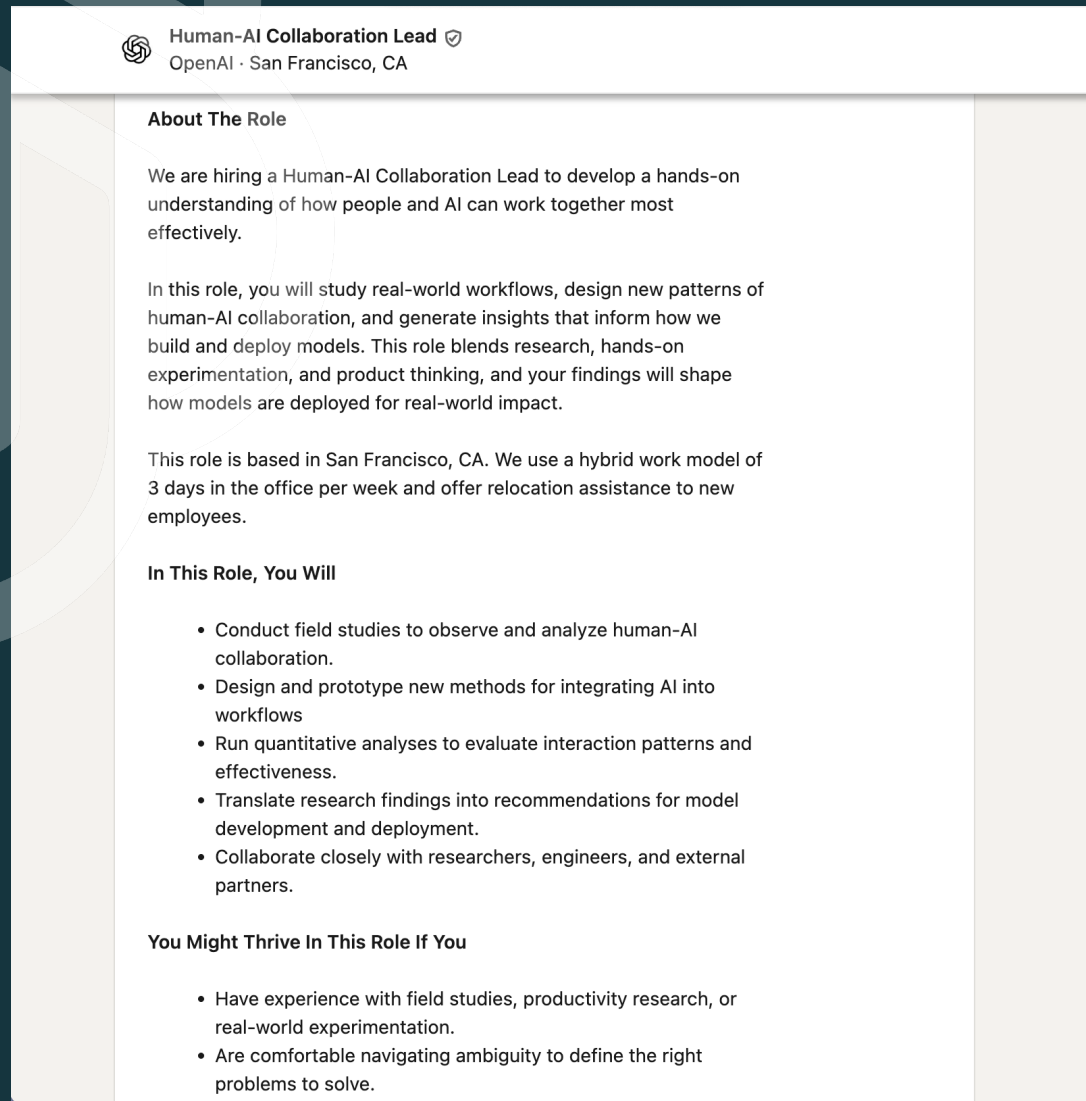
"It takes a surprising amount of effort, to communicate what we want out of a particular task or a project to a human contractor.
That the same thing is going to happen with AI.
A lot of what's involved in jobs is just specifying the task, and a lot of what is going to be involved is monitoring of AI and ensuring that it's not running amok."

AI as Normal Technology
An alternative to the vision of AI as a potential superintelligence
By Arvind Narayanan and Sayash Kapoor April 15th, 2025

A role from the future—posted a few weeks ago
human-AI collaboration lead

"develop a hands-on understanding of how people and AI can work together most effectively…

…you will study real-world workflows, design new patterns of human-AI collaboration and generate insights that inform how we build and deploy models."



Human-AI Collaboration Lead
OpenAI · San Francisco, CA

About The Role

We are hiring a Human-AI Collaboration Lead to develop a hands-on understanding of how people and AI can work together most effectively.

In this role, you will study real-world workflows, design new patterns of human-AI collaboration, and generate insights that inform how we build and deploy models. This role blends research, hands-on experimentation, and product thinking, and your findings will shape how models are deployed for real-world impact.

This role is based in San Francisco, CA. We use a hybrid work model of 3 days in the office per week and offer relocation assistance to new employees.

In This Role, You Will

- Conduct field studies to observe and analyze human-AI collaboration.
- Design and prototype new methods for integrating AI into workflows
- Run quantitative analyses to evaluate interaction patterns and effectiveness.
- Translate research findings into recommendations for model development and deployment.
- Collaborate closely with researchers, engineers, and external partners.

You Might Thrive In This Role If You

- Have experience with field studies, productivity research, or real-world experimentation.
- Are comfortable navigating ambiguity to define the right problems to solve.

“we’ll be designing for agents.
not for users” John Maeda

UX
screens → AX
outcomes, and decision flows

visual UI → actualizing outcomes
with zero visual affordances

“The IT department of every company is going to be the HR department of AI agents in the future.”

Jensen Huang
President & CEO Nvidia

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yikes!

“The IT department of every company is going to be the HR department of AI agents in the future.”

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Humans cannot be solely defined by their job— but agents are defined solely by the work they accomplish

Ashwin Acharya
Accenture Global Lead
Data & AI for Talent & Organization

Design Trends Agent

Primary Functions/Outcomes

Continuously scan and synthesize visual, UI, and cultural design trends from public data, industry reports, and social platforms. Generate monthly and quarterly trend reports tailored to target industries (e.g., retail, fintech, fashion).

Skill Requirements

Visual Pattern Recognition | Aesthetic Reasoning | Cultural Interpretation | +10

Human-AI Interaction Model

The agent provides structured reports and visual references, with citations and relevance scores. Creative Leads are responsible for reviewing AI-generated materials before client delivery.

Decision Rights & Constraints

- Opine on the meaning of trends
- Make recommendations for brand shifts
- May not modify design system with trends
- Summarize public design data
- Identify visual patterns
- Map designs to trends

Performance Metrics

Efficiency | Accuracy | Explainability

Ethical & Compliance Boundaries

Only sources publicly available or authorized proprietary content. Clearly distinguishes between fact, speculation, and inference. Does not create derivative work from copyrighted materials. Operates transparently, with all insights traceable to source references.

Aspects of managing an agent or agents?*

Controlling

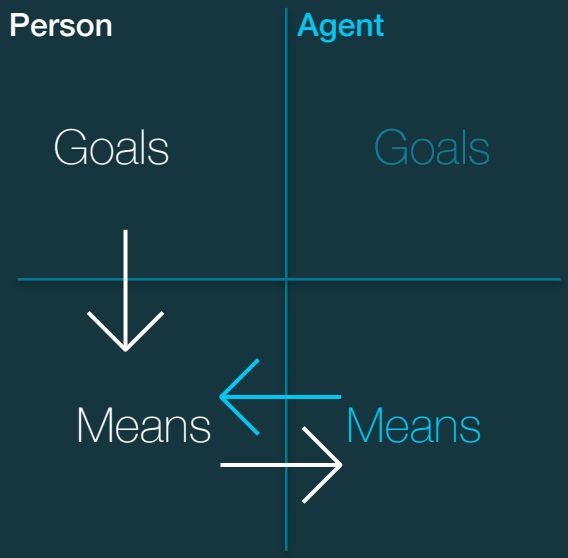
Person describes to agent exactly what to do and how to do it

Image generation prompt

(a cinematic, high-fashion portrait of a serene, ethereal woman shot with Canon EOS R5, 85mm lens, f/1.8, cinematic lighting, ultra-detailed, photorealistic, 8k)

Mentoring

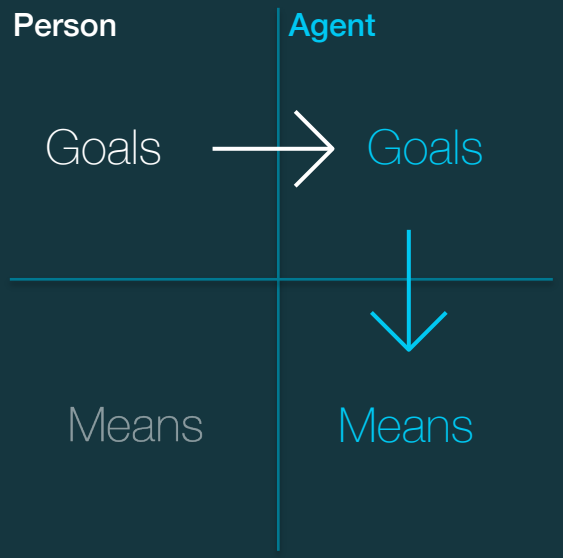
Person sets goals and parameters for means for the agent



Create a 15-page presentation using this template

Delegating

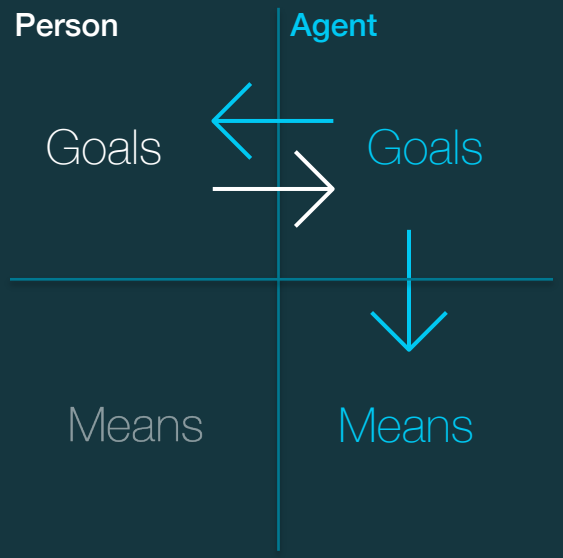
Person sets goals and leaves means to the agent



Buy white size 8 tennis shoes

Collaborating

Person and agent co-create goals and provide feedback on means



Deep research request

*A translation of a framework from Dubberly Design to applied to agents

is designing different?

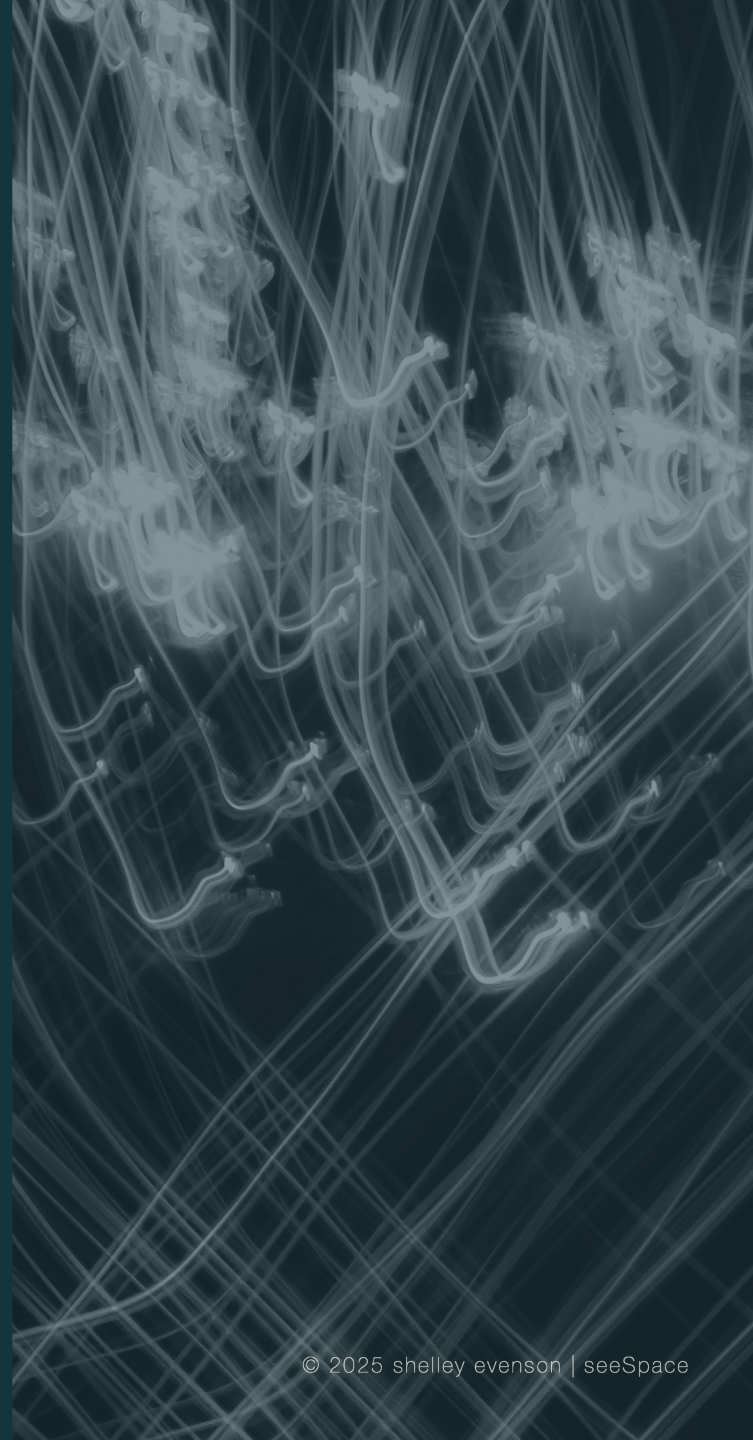
Designers need new mindsets and skills when it comes to designing for agentic

mindsets

from control to collaboration

from prescriptive to generative

from deterministic to probabilistic



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New skills when designing for agentic

Create prompt sets

The inputs or sets of prompts you provide to the model to get a desired output

Shape Evals

The framework and used to measure the quality of a model's output

(The prompt set is the exam questions you give the model, and the Eval is the grading rubric and score sheet you use to assess its performance)* gemini

Understand the implications of model accuracy on user expectations and brand promise

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Prompt sets are the new PRDs

Learning prompt set for concept exploration

- Explain the basic concept of photosynthesis in simple terms.
- What are the key inputs and outputs of photosynthesis?
- Describe the role of chlorophyll in this process.
- Generate a short quiz with 3 multiple-choice questions about photosynthesis.

Story Development prompt set

- Generate three potential main characters for a fantasy novel set in a post-apocalyptic world. Include their primary motivations and a unique skill.
- For the first character, outline a potential character arc across a three-act structure.
- Write the opening scene (approx. 500 words) introducing this character and hinting at the central conflict.
- Suggest three plot twists that could occur in the second act involving this character.

"With AI products you need to start with the set of prompts that you want the AI product to do really well. Prompt sets are collections of carefully crafted instructions designed to guide the AI. Unlike single prompts, these structured series of inputs allow for more complex interactions, iterative refinement, and nuanced outputs."

Aparna Chennapragada
Microsoft CPO Lenny's podcast May 18th, 2025

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New interaction patterns and collaborative experiences for people and agents

contextual task chaining & collaborative problem solving

Provide ways for the agent to recognize related tasks and proactively offer to chain them together and instead of just executing commands. Engage in true back-and-forth problem solving.

progressive autonomy

Provide ways for the user to gradually increase agent autonomy based on measured confidence and feedback. Also be able revoke credentials when an agent's permissions or trustworthiness changes.

ambient intelligence

Provide ways for agents to observe work patterns in the background and surface relevant assistance at natural transition points.

intelligent interruption

Provide the agent with clear approaches for determining when and how to interrupt the user's flow.

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New interaction patterns and collaborative experiences for people and agents

temporal touchpoints

Provide ways for the user and agents to have meta conversations by establishing regular check-ins and retrospectives to improve its service.

Outlearn & outforget!

predictive branching

Provide ways for agentic systems to present multiple potential workflow paths before a user must commit. Consider offering potential success scores for the branches.

semantic morphing & conversational scaffolding

Offer the user UI elements that change functionally based on semantic understanding, to support "dynamic decision-making and adaptability"

Provide the user with dynamic temporary UI structures that agents build during complex tasks, then dissolve when complete.
(UI on the fly)

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What to consider when reimagining workflows

Goal and outcomes	What is the user trying to accomplish? What are the expected outcomes?
Roles and tools	What part does the AI play and what specialized capabilities do they need?
Collaboration process	How does the work come together between the human and the AI?
Feedback	How can the user easily provide feedback to improve the AI and vice versa?
Transparency	How does the AI explain its reasoning to build user trust and understanding?
Success Metrics	How will we measure if the process is improving performance and experience? Economic “Turing test”

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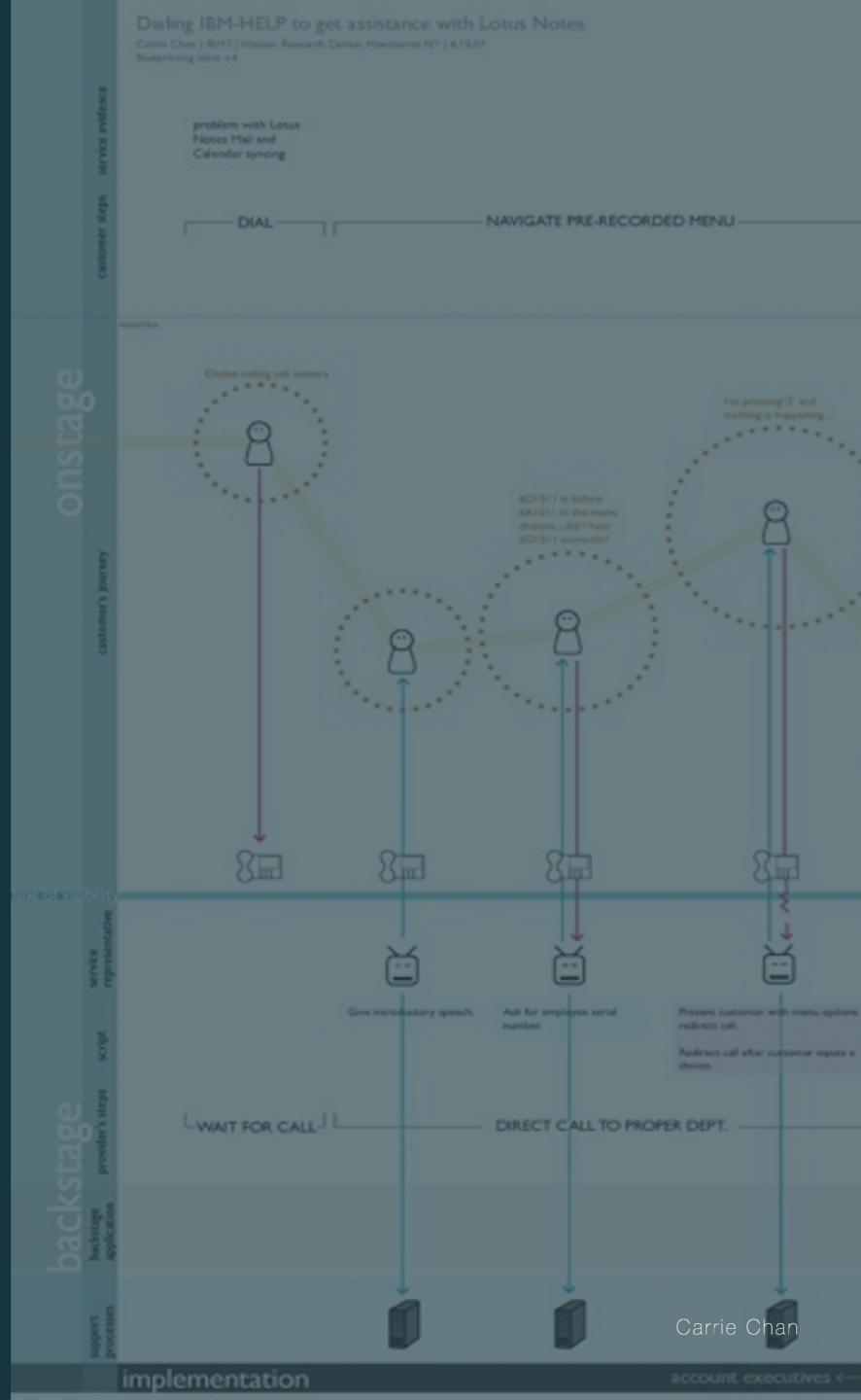
It’s not about blueprints anymore
—but it sounds like service design

we’re designing dynamic, self-adapting systems
with robust learning loops and adaptive behaviors

we’re acting as co-creators with AI
(designing with AI)
and shaping evolving agent ecologies
(designing for AI)

service design

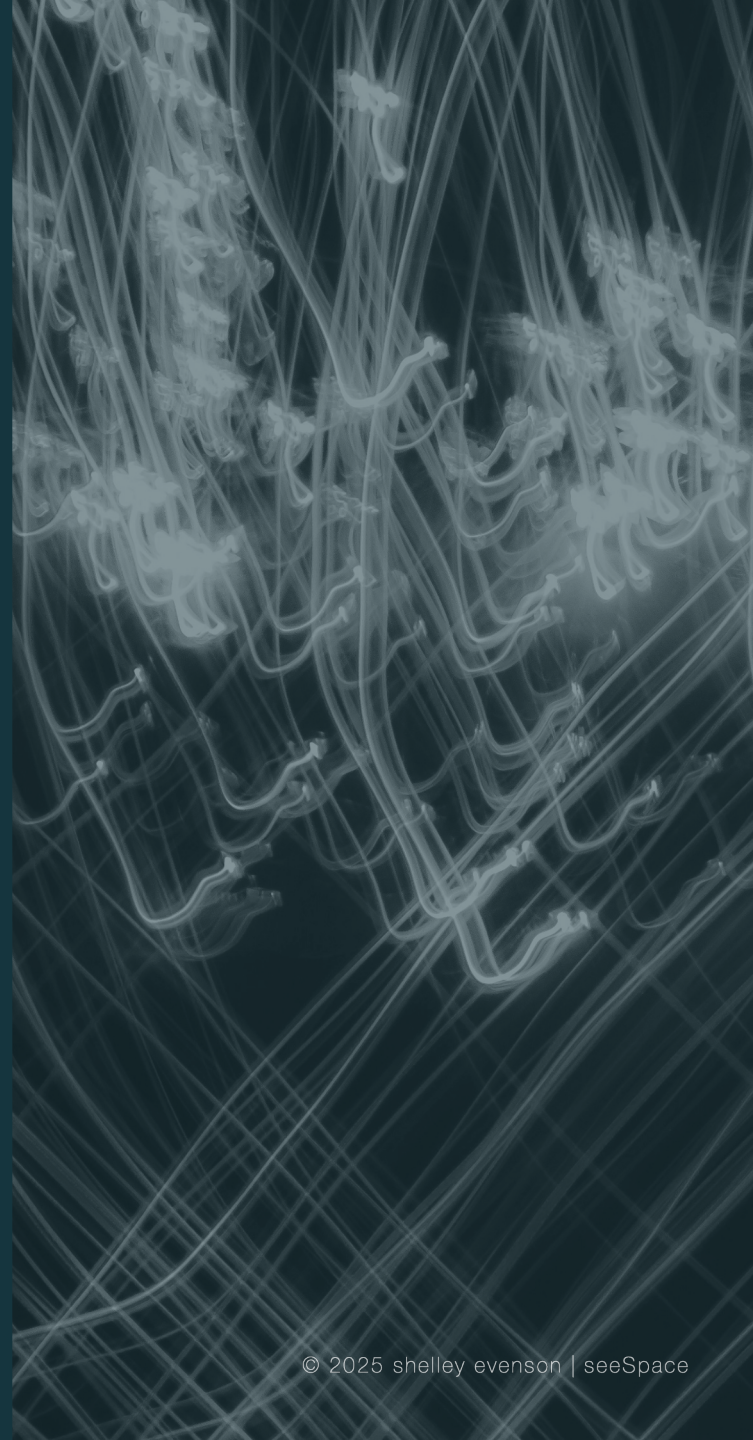


designing design?

we'll be designing both with and for agents so that people can build their workflows and relationships for themselves.

the key idea is to empower people to become better co-creators or collaborators with agentic systems.

To be successful, we're going to need new frameworks, approaches, and guidelines for agent design and interaction.



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collaboration is at the heart
(among the design team and
at the center of the identities
of the agents)

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There are big big challenges…

autonomy introduces risk, complexity,
and incredible ethical responsibility

data quality and context gaps | accuracy, and integrity | emergent behaviors and unintended consequences | unexpected outcomes from system interactions | cultural resistance and organizational inertia | challenges in adapting to new processes | integration complexity and technical debt…

so, no matter what,
we need to design for trust

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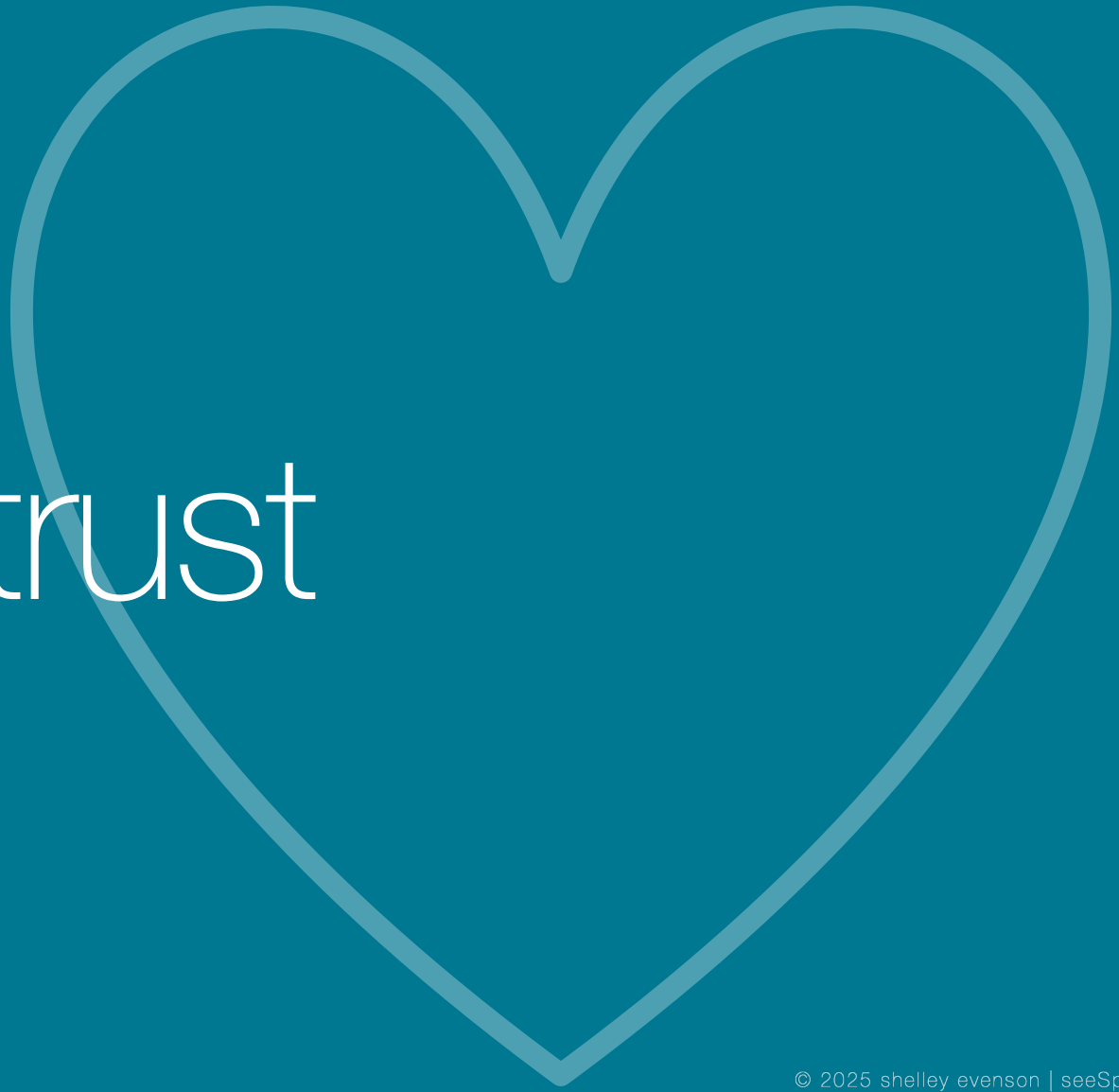
designing for trust



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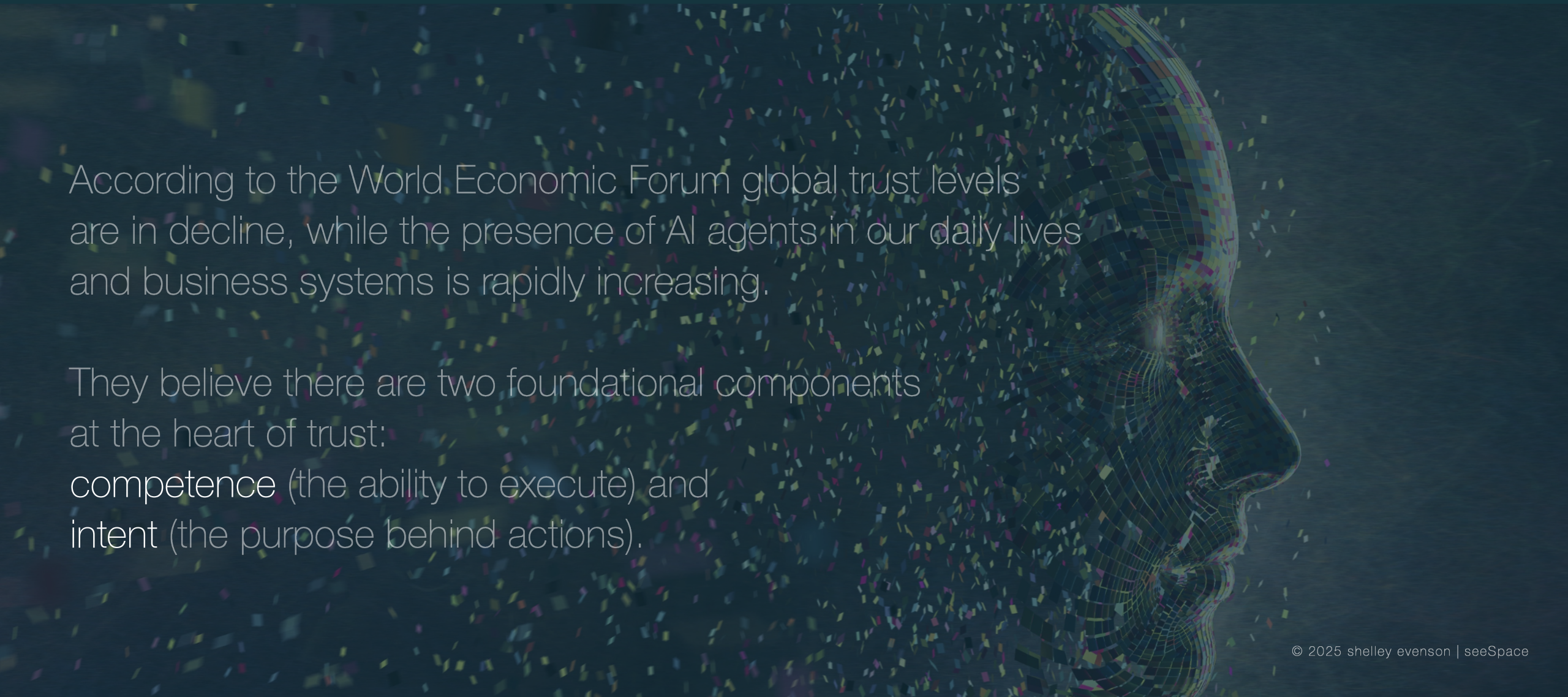
The agent economy could break trust—or transform it.



According to the World Economic Forum global trust levels are in decline, while the presence of AI agents in our daily lives and business systems is rapidly increasing.

They believe there are two foundational components at the heart of trust:
competence (the ability to execute) and
intent (the purpose behind actions).

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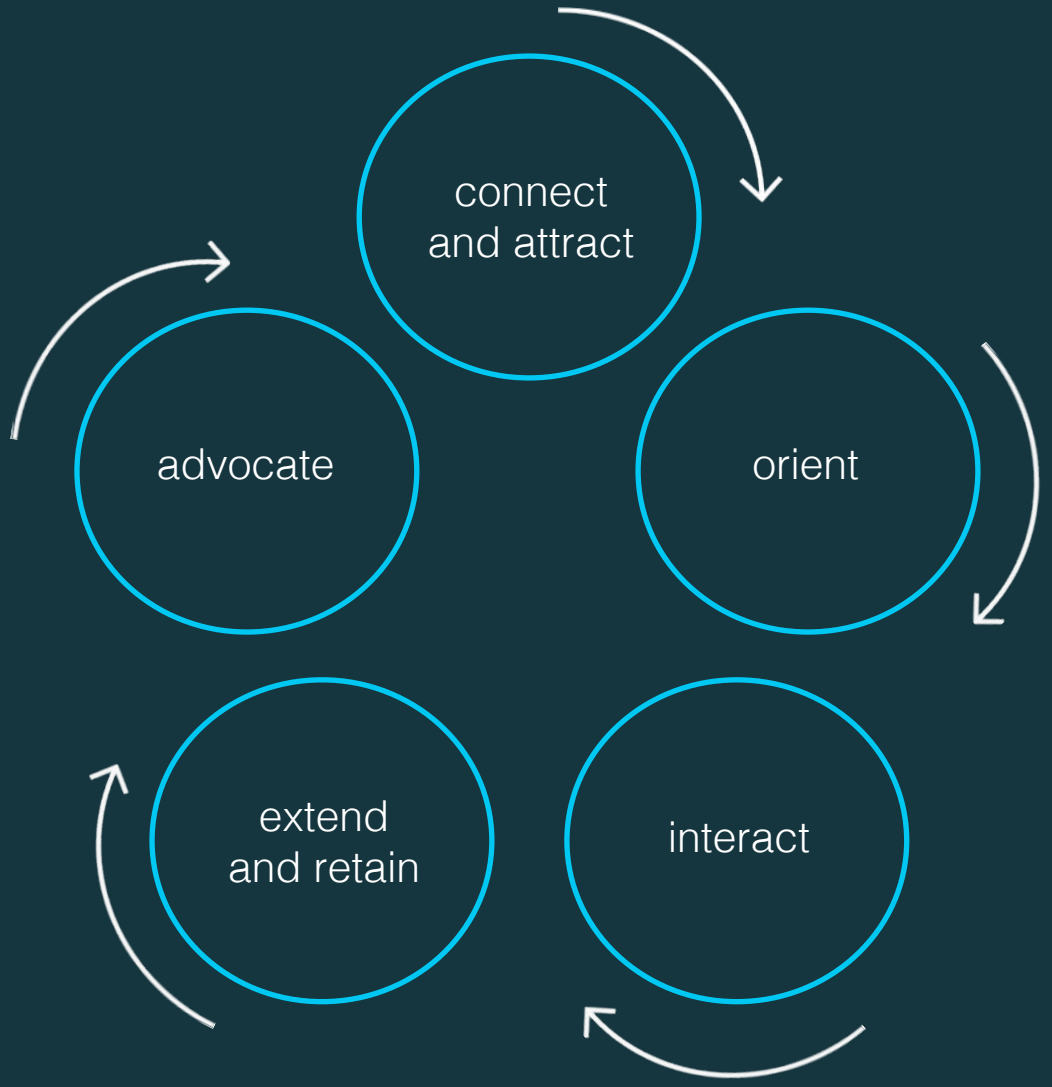
Trust is a relationship built over time

Beware of anthropomorphism

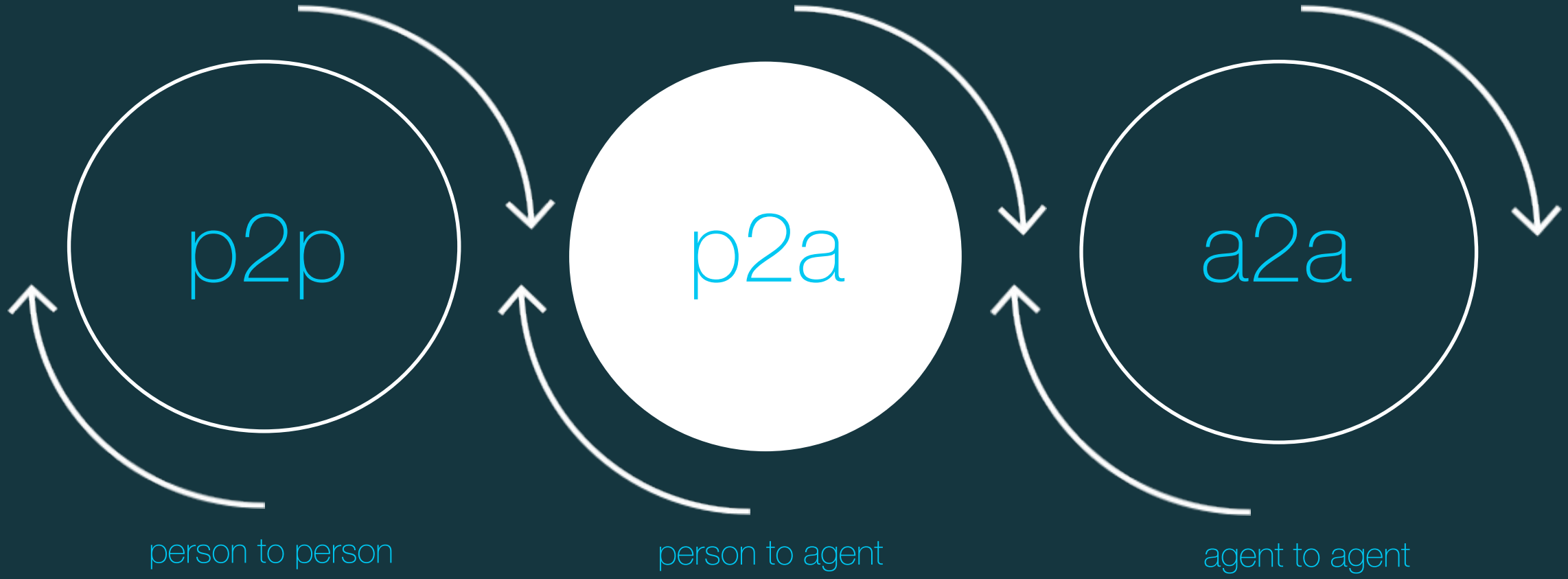
Many dimensions drive for trust for people

- predictability
- respect for privacy
- responsibility for mistakes
- transparency & explainability
- reliability & safety
- human-centeredness
- user control & agency

as it naturally evolves over time, it is influenced by expectations, and modified by experience



Trust needs to be considered across all the participants



Trust needs to be considered across all the participants

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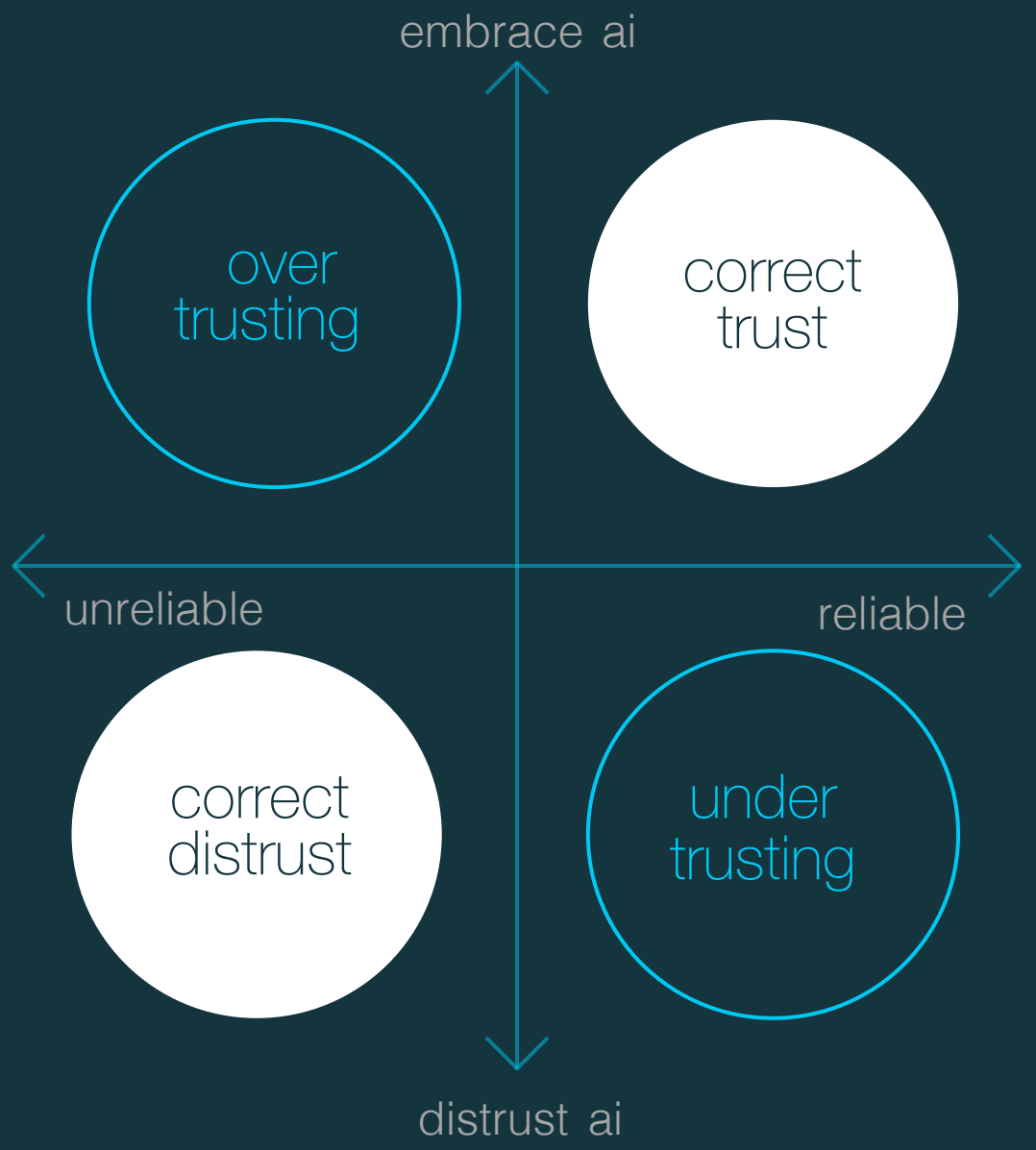
It's important to get the balance just right

We need to help people develop an appropriate level of skepticism.

The greater the accuracy, the less we check = the more likely inaccurate content is in the finished output (and in future training)



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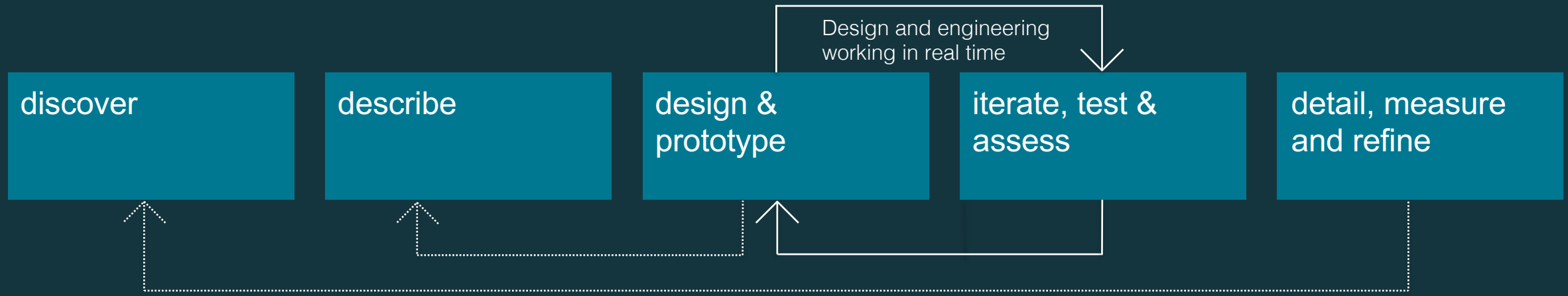
Getting started—find a partner (pm, tech researcher, dev) to collaborate with (there is power in small teams)



Use design research methods to develop a hands-on understanding of people's workflows identifying opportunities for how people and AI can work together most effectively. Describe what's needed for uptake and what the persistent agent identity/identities should be.

Describe the human | AI framework and strategy and translate research findings into design implications. Create prompt sets designed to guide the agents through the workflows and shape agent development and deployment. Begin to shape agent governance.

Design, prototype, build and test the workflows with new design patterns driven by the user research and the prompt sets. Refine prompt sets as needed.

Quantitatively (evals) and qualitatively assess (trust) the effectiveness of the workflows and new design patterns.

Engage users to ascertain if the results pass competence (the ability to execute) and intent (the purpose behind actions) test?

Detail the design, and measure the outcomes—do they pass the economic Turing test?

Manage for uptake

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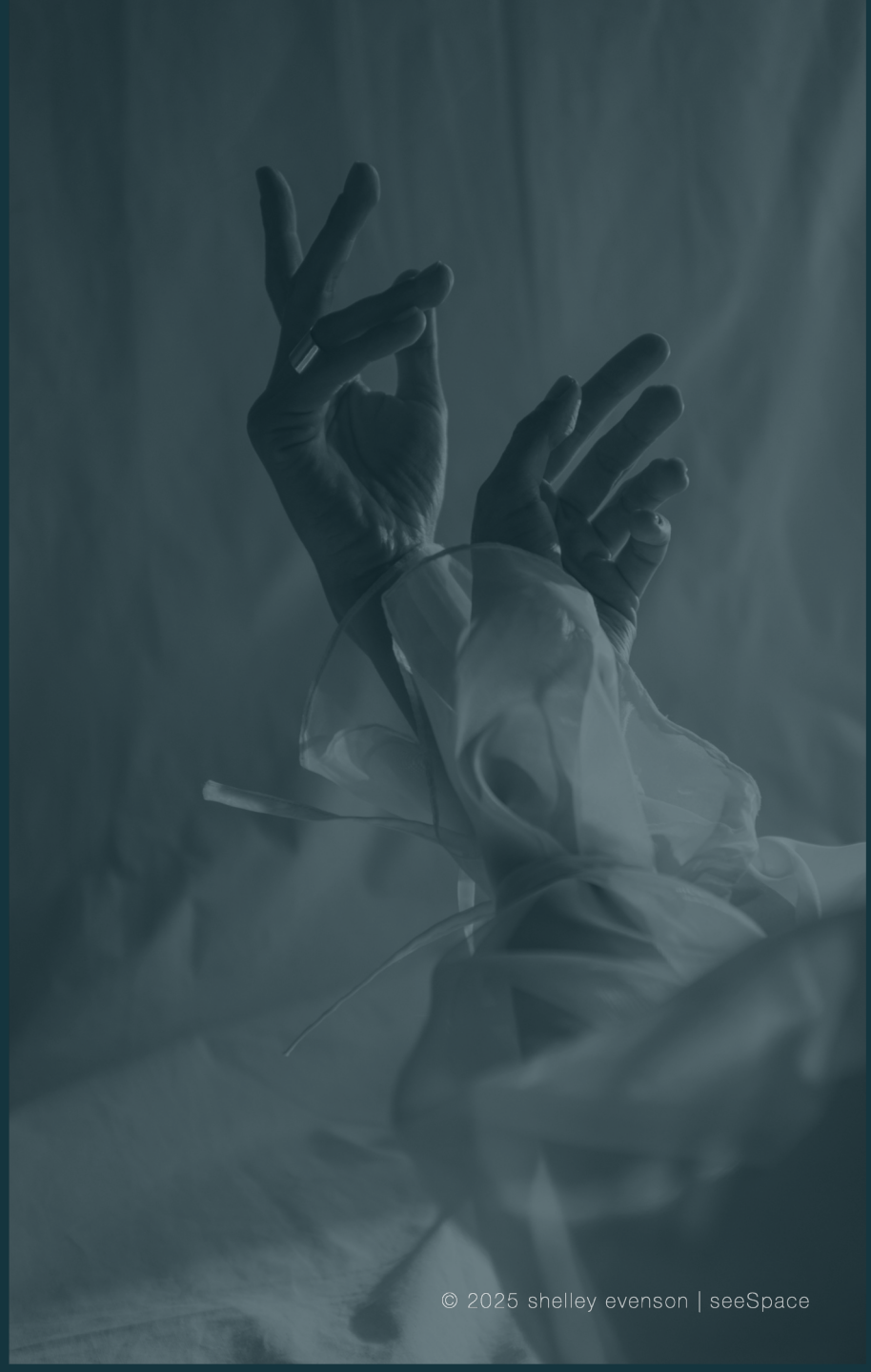
Design with care—

Strive to make the dance between people and agents efficient, enhancing, desirable, differentiating, and designed for uptake for people and agents

$e^2d^3p\&a$



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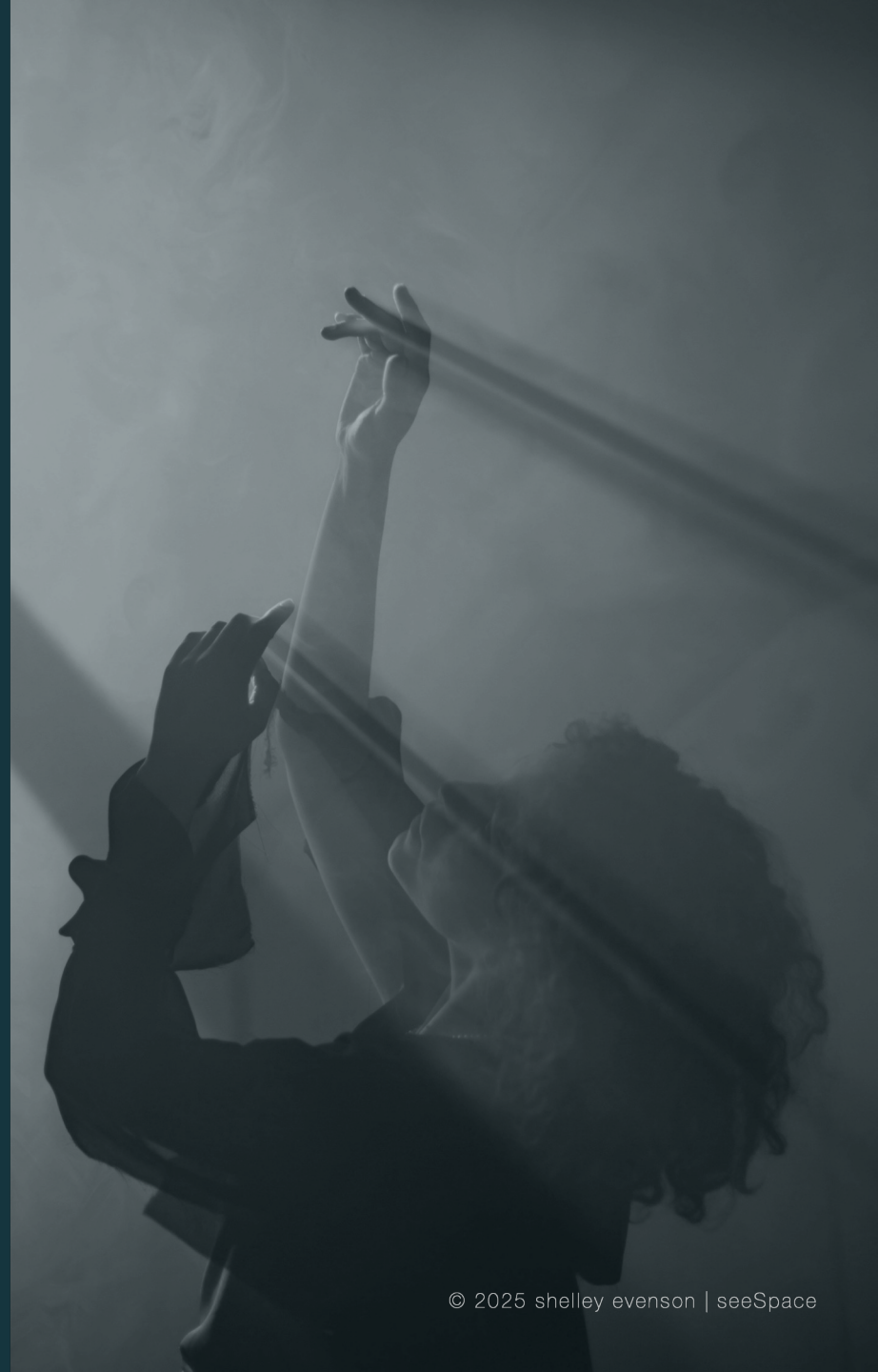
Design with care—

"Successful implementations don't minimize human involvement—they transform it, elevating humans to what we might call "cognitive choreographers" orchestrating the interaction between different AI capabilities and ensuring their alignment with human values and objectives."

— Pascal Bornet, Agentic Artificial Intelligence: Harnessing AI Agents to Reinvent Business, Work and Life



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Hope for the future

"create AI that makes us more human, deepens our trust and understanding of one another, and strengthens our connections to the real world"

19 August 2025 Source Mustafa Suleyman

We must build AI for people; not to be a person

Seemingly Conscious AI is Coming

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thank you

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discussion