

# Unlocking Innovation:

## Encouraging Employees to Think Outside the Box

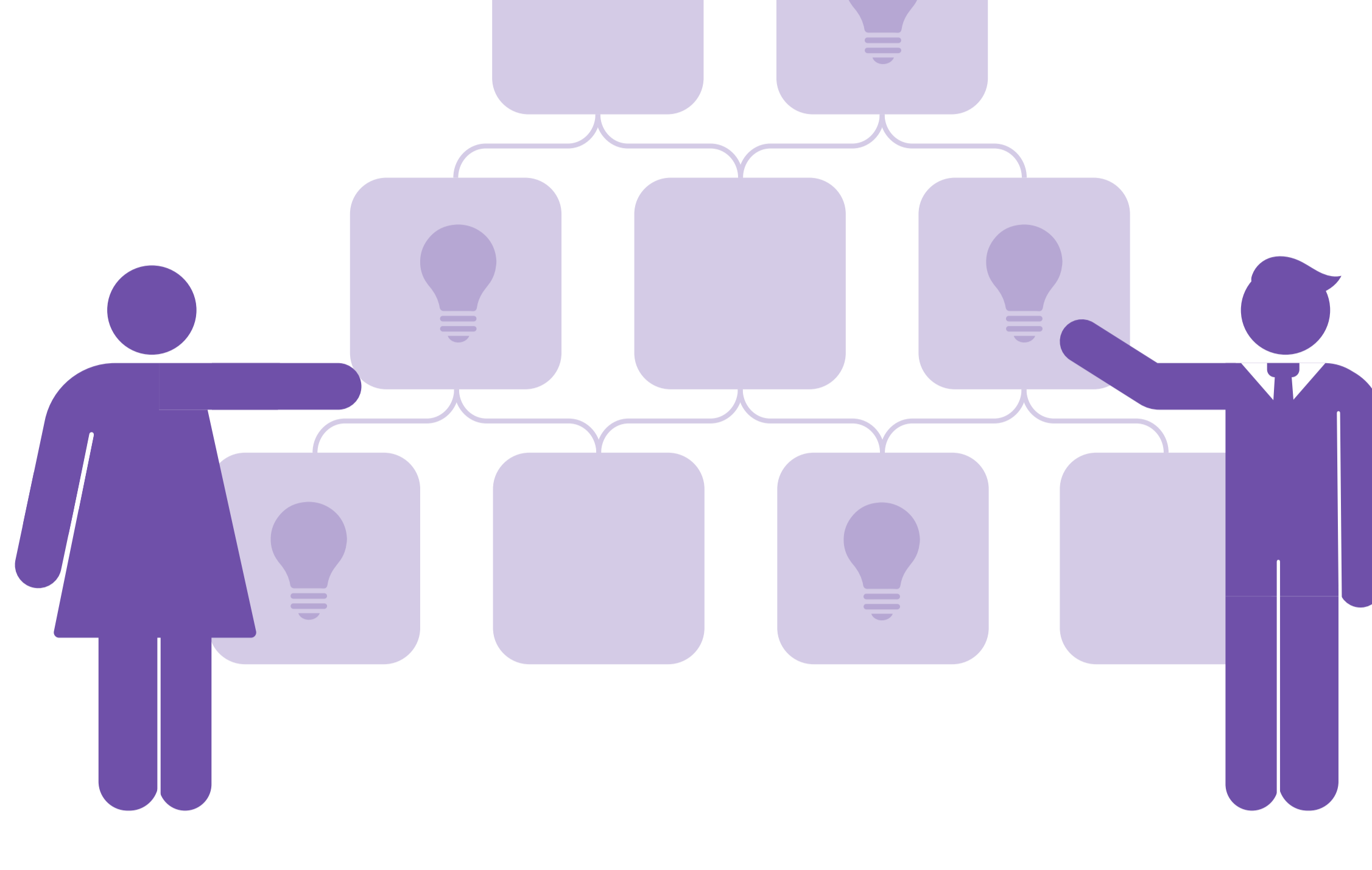
# Innovation



**Innovation is widely seen as essential in business**—not just for leadership, but across all levels of an organization. Yet innovation doesn't always happen spontaneously. Without a structured approach, ideas can easily stall, teams may focus solely on execution, and opportunities for growth might go unnoticed. One method increasingly used to encourage innovation is design thinking: a structured, user-centric approach to problem-solving. This framework can help organizations nurture creativity and develop solutions that better meet user needs.

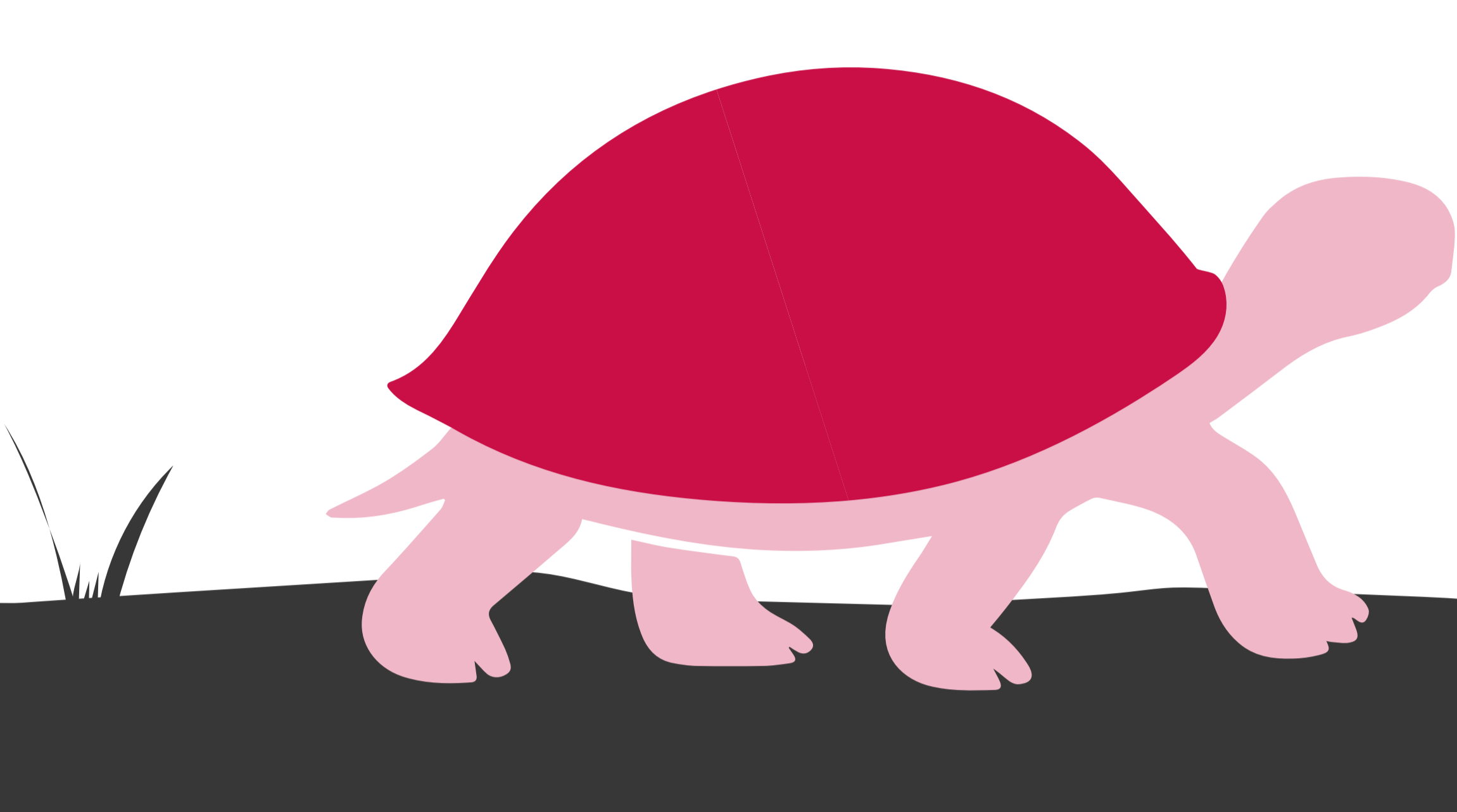
### ➤ Innovation Is for Everyone

**Innovation isn't reserved for the C-suite anymore**—it's relevant across the board. But let's be honest: waiting for a lightbulb moment isn't a reliable plan. Without some structure, even good ideas can fade out, and teams may stay stuck in "get-it-done" mode. That's where design thinking can help. Think of it as a recipe for creativity—a user-focused, step-by-step method that brings ideas to life.



### ➤ Why Execution Alone May Not Be Enough

**Execution is important—no question.** But when it's the sole focus, long-term growth can be harder to achieve. According to AlixPartners' Disruption Index 2025, 41% of executives say their companies are too slow to adapt<sup>1</sup>—a real challenge in today's fast-moving markets. Fostering innovation can help organizations become more adaptable and responsive to change. Still, only 6% of organizations are satisfied and don't plan to change their workplace strategy, according to Deloitte.<sup>2</sup> This suggests a gap in innovation culture—and highlights an opportunity for more training and support.



### ➤ Bridging the Innovation Gap

**Coming up with good ideas is tough**—but turning them into results can be even tougher. Many businesses find it challenging to translate creativity into practical, scalable solutions. Some common hurdles include:

Addressing these challenges can help leaders bridge the gap between ideation and implementation. Design thinking offers a practical approach for doing just that.

#### Lack of formal training

Without exposure to structured innovation methods, employees may find it hard to move ideas forward confidently.

#### Over-prioritizing efficiency

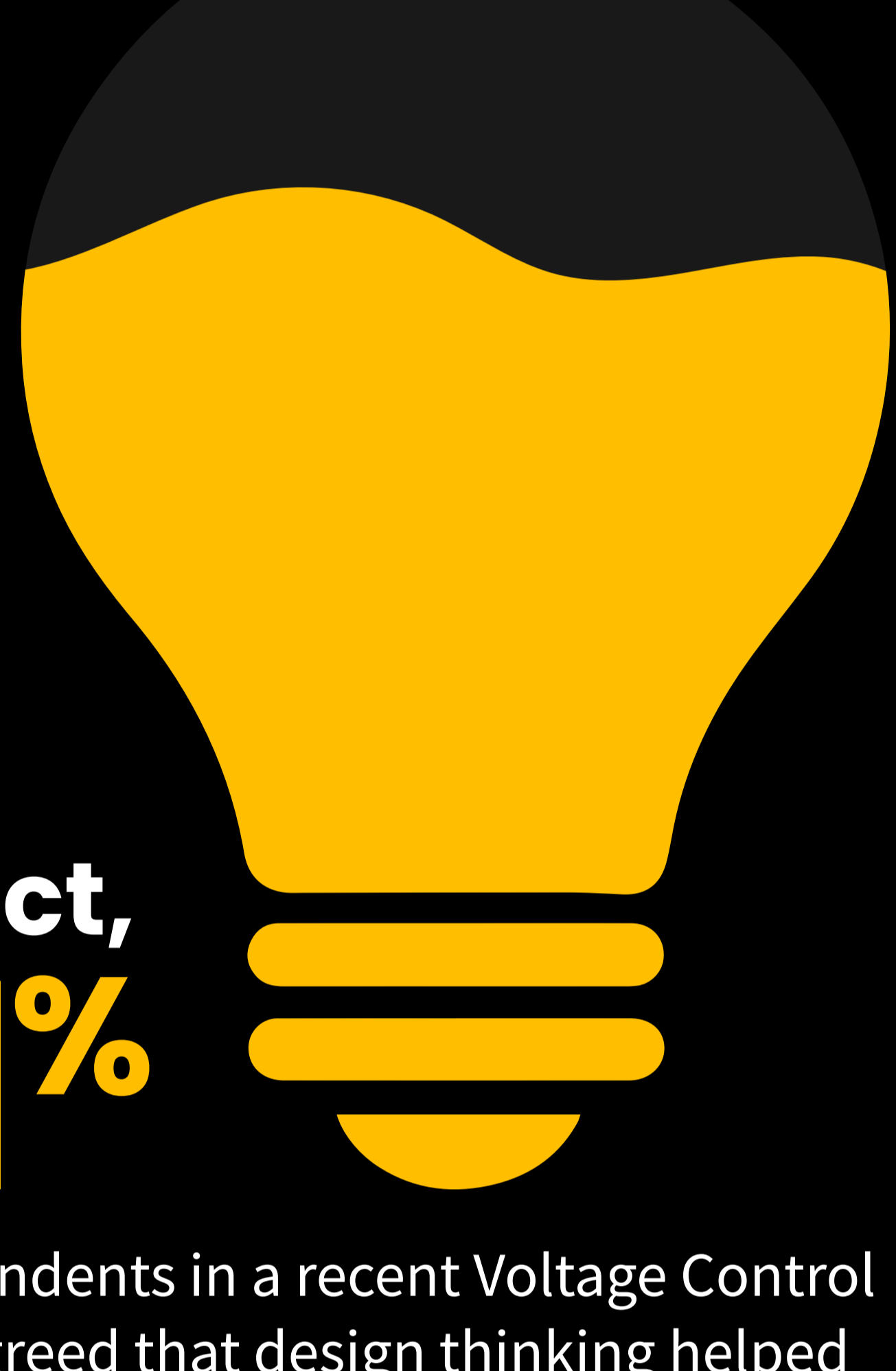
When speed and productivity dominate, creativity can unintentionally take a back seat.

#### Missing frameworks

Without a process like design thinking, even promising ideas may never be fully explored.

### ➤ Design Thinking: Innovation's Secret Sauce

Design thinking is a structured yet flexible method for solving problems with a creative, user-first mindset. It encourages curiosity, empathy, and iteration—and it can be adapted across a wide range of business contexts.



- Organizations using design thinking often report benefits such as:**
- Identifying unmet customer needs through empathy-driven research
  - Testing ideas quickly and affordably
  - Encouraging collaboration and ongoing improvement

**In fact, 71%** of respondents in a recent Voltage Control study agreed that design thinking helped shift their work culture.<sup>3</sup>

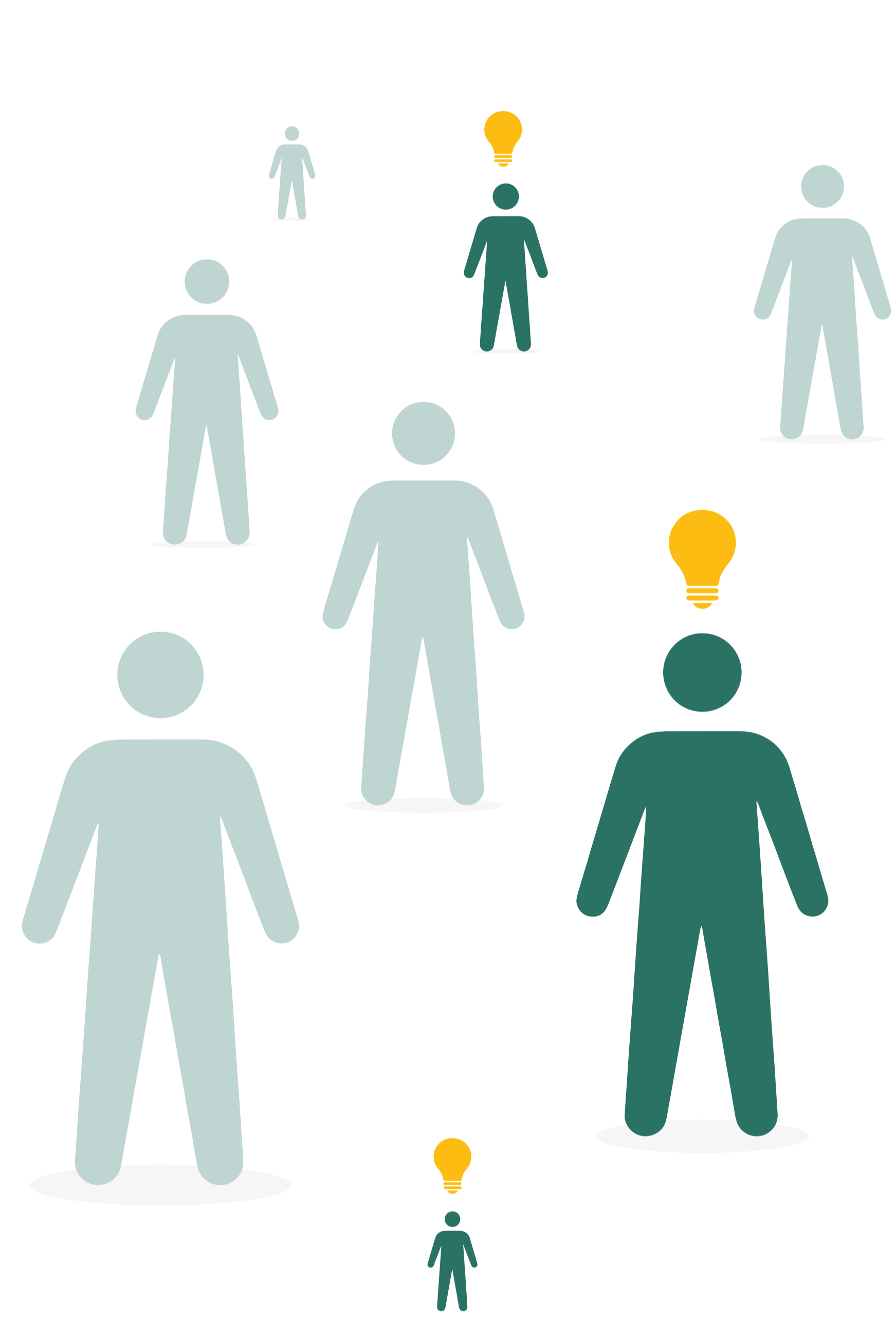
#### Programs like the Keller Innovation Certificate make design thinking actionable

by teaching employees how to apply it in real-world scenarios. **Leadership programs that incorporate design thinking** have also been linked to a

**12%** improvement in employee retention, according to a study by DDI.<sup>4</sup>

### ➤ Innovation as a Workforce Skill

**Supporting innovation at all levels can lead to meaningful benefits.** While results may vary, potential outcomes include:



**Stronger problem-solving**

Employees trained in innovation methods may feel more confident addressing complex issues.

**Higher engagement**

When team members see their ideas explored or implemented, it can increase motivation and buy-in.

**Improved adaptability**

Companies that make space for innovation may be better prepared for changing market conditions.

**Design thinking isn't limited to product design**—it's a mindset that can elevate areas from operations to customer experience. As adaptability becomes increasingly critical, it's worth noting that

**71%** of executives across 90 countries cited it as the top leadership quality, according to McKinsey & Company's State of AI 2023 report.<sup>5</sup>



### ➤ Learning from Leaders in Innovation

**Some of the world's most well-known brands have embraced design thinking to stay ahead:**

Other companies—like Nike, Starbucks, Bank of America, Nordstrom, GE Healthcare, and Oral-B—have also applied design thinking to stay close to customer needs and drive innovation.

airbnb

Redefined lodging with personalized, flexible options.

NETFLIX

Revolutionized how we consume content through on-demand streaming and data-driven personalization.

Uber

Modernized transportation with real-time, tech-enabled ride-hailing.

Apple

Created a seamless product ecosystem that emphasizes simplicity and integration.

Spotify

Transformed music discovery and listening with a user-friendly, personalized experience.

### The Bottom Line

**Innovation doesn't have to be a gamble. With the right mindset and tools—like design thinking—organizations can build a culture where curiosity and experimentation thrive. And with adaptability topping the list of key leadership qualities, empowering employees with innovation skills isn't just a bonus—it's a smart move.**

**Download the Guide: Fuel Your Innovation Journey**

**Ready to transform your workforce into a hub of innovation?**

Download our infographic to explore how structured innovation training can help your company stay competitive and forward-thinking.

Let's empower your employees to think differently starting today.

Disclaimers:

1. Disruption Index 2025, Alix Partners (2025)

2. Global Human Capital Trends 2023, Deloitte (2023)

3. 5 Steps of the Design Thinking Process: A Step-by-Step Guide, Voltage Control (August 2023)

4. Total Economic Impact Study, DDI (October 2024)

5. The State of AI in 2023, McKinsey and Co (2023)

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