

Discover. Reflect. Execute.

A guide to collaborative
digital creation.

Written by the MMC team.



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Why did we create this work? And what are you about to see?

At MMC, we aim to bring positive change into the world, by finding ways that digital can connect us. We do it by first discovering the purpose of our work together.

We then use creative digital executions to bring our joint purpose to life.

This means that the output is often something you can see, and interact with.

And because we first work with you on the purpose of our work, it means it will also be increased time, or

added value, or more productive relationships. This is because when purpose drives the decisions, digital simply becomes the vehicle to deliver the positive change.

The digital world is now simply an extension of our lives, and a purpose can come to life in so many ways. We have experience with many technologies to create applications, systems, or creative digital executions in technologies that you and your teams may already use.

To achieve our work, we have a process. It is a set of markers for our work. A collection of dots, that join the beginning, to the end, to the beginning of the next thing.

What you are about to read, are those dots, and how we join them. We use these markers to remind us to write down what we are trying to do together, and why we are doing it. We use them to put ourselves in the shoes of our future selves, and anticipate what bits might be difficult. Or the shoes of others – to remind ourselves always who we are doing it for.

It describes how we carry out our work.

We call it collaborative digital creation, because it works best when we do it together. By listening to your needs, crafting our joint purpose and then creating something wonderful together.

Part 1: Discover

What is it for?

What are we trying to do?

What changed?

Who is it for?

What is the purpose?

Part 2: Reflect

What is going to be hard?

What are the boundaries?

Where do we start (and what is the order we do things)?



Part 3: Execute

How will it work?

Inside and out.

Production.

Test, test, test.

How do we tell everyone?

Maintenance





Collaborative digital execution

Part 1: Discover.

What is it for?

It is a simple question, but does not have a simple answer. It is a question we pose a lot at MMC, and especially right at the start of anything.

We ask what something is for, because it is the first step in understanding the specific change we are seeking to make, and the audience we are doing it for. It helps us understand what is important to you, so it can become important to us.

We ask because if we are able to express this ourselves, then we are more likely to be able to change others. To convince others that what we are doing is of value in their lives as well as ours.

We ask you to come on this journey with us.

When we are done, we aim to have an idea, that we can create together. Led by the purpose, and made real in one of many ways. It might be words, or a promise. It might be a set of materials.

It might be a prototype, or a product. We hope the output has something of the unexpected to it, because the best journeys are like that.

We call it 'discovery',
because we like to
sound like we're on an
adventure.

And we think that
everyone loves an
adventure.

What are we trying to do?

Before we can make a change, or bring that idea into the world, we need to define it.

It is the first step in defining our purpose. And when we first define what we need, it makes it easier to later work out if what we are doing is good, or working.

We might already know the goal with absolute clarity, which will make this part easy.

We might change our minds as we go, and that is fine too. We find some of the best things, when we are looking for something else.

We also hope to enjoy this part, and let it breathe. There is often pressure to be right first time in our work, or to give the perfect answer straight away. This creates a pressure that does not exist in other areas of our lives.

MMC uses a goal setting canvas to capture thoughts during this stage. Anyone can add to this canvas, it is something we will create collaboratively. We like to build a canvas to express all the things we think we are trying to achieve, and we call it that because we hope it will begin messy, and gradually become refined.

What changed?

Knowing what we want to do, and how to describe it, is fuel to our forward motion.

But choosing a new future can be caused by an itch. It didn't exist, and suddenly it has invaded our lives. Knowing what caused the itch is the next step to understand why our goals are the right ones.

This is because when we make a new decision, it is usually because something changed. It is usually a rift in the status quo, or a piece of new information that is forcing us to make a decision or choose a new path. Even if a decision is subconscious, it is usually rational. It is usually a choice.

You do it on purpose.

Even the fact you are reading this is because there was a trigger, that created action. Figuring out the change agents, can move us closer to our purpose and ultimately understanding why we are doing what we are doing. It might be that we have seen something our competition is doing. We might have observed or experienced inefficiency in our teams. The want to be more innovative, or more efficient, are prompts to act with purpose. We will add these to our canvas, because there are usually only a few, and we'll know what they are.

Itches are like that. They focus the mind.

Who is it for?

To understand who our audience are, and what they need, means we need to put ourselves in their shoes.

And everyone has a story.

What you are experiencing that has led to this moment of creation, is likely to be felt by others. They will need something. They will have pressures that we can relieve. They will have expectations that we need to fulfil. All these need to be considered in order to achieve our goal.

At this stage, our aim is to get to know the people who we believe will be users and stakeholders in our idea. We will try to understand who they are, and what we need to consider to bring value to their lives.

If we can, we will also interact with them directly, in a way that makes a connection. If this is the case, then it will be the first moment we talk to others about our idea.

It is going to be a rich moment of information gathering. We may wish to stay here awhile, and accept the generosity of feedback to adjust our idea.

It is the moment we will also realise that nothing is for everyone.

What is the purpose?

Many projects approach purpose in a much more direct way. It does make sense. When we are excited and motivated to make change we have things to say, we find ways to say them.

If we were selling you a product, then we would already know the list of benefits. The elevator pitch, or the list of intentions on a PowerPoint slide, are the accepted way. If you were selling a product to your teams, you would do the same.

But if you have come this far with us, then it means we are doing more than that together. We are creating an idea, that will tell a story, that will make positive change happen when we bring it to life. And to do that, we need to ask, as well as tell. Accept challenge, and use it to refine.

We need to understand the theme of our story, and the goal we have in mind at the end. We need to understand what we believed before, and what changed. We need to understand who else is involved, and what is important to them. We need to know why we are doing it.

These are the facts, and through the facts we can find a purpose that changes the future.

Collaborative Digital Creation

Part 2: Reflect

What is going to be hard?

Constraints are a chasm. They are the chasm between an interesting idea and an approval. Between something on paper and something in reality. Between the functionality we want, and the functionality we can deliver.

Hard parts are also an inevitable part of any journey, and so before we begin the next part, it helps to have a map handy. Knowing where the constraints will be, helps us to anticipate how we'll build a bridge over each chasm, or find a way around them, and who might be able to help us.

We will always write these down too. Because saying the hard things out loud is the first step to overcoming them. We don't have to show them to anyone, or we can tell everyone.

MMC will work with you to make a plan for constraints we think we'll encounter. They may be practical difficulties, which means they can be practically planned for. They may be perception gaps, which means we can find ways to create consensus.

In identifying constraints, we'll gain access to new information and people that can bring overall productivity and value to a project.

We might not know where all the chasms are, but that is also inevitable too. When we are making positive change together, we are likely to go to places that haven't been mapped yet.

Reflection is brief, but
it is an important shift
in our weight. Done
correctly, it gives
momentum.

Where are the boundaries?

Ideas and feasibility, are in constant conflict. Creating a new version of the future is possible, but it also needs to recognise the effort and resources it will take.

We may decide some boundaries we cannot overcome with the time, effort and resources we have and we will need to revisit some decisions.

It might be that should we believe a solution is not possible unless we change our technology. It might be that the owner of data or of a process may not allow us to cross a boundary without being convinced.

We might need to stop, and reconsider everything.

We should not be afraid to be honest about our boundaries. Exploring them, and testing our assumptions of boundaries regularly is important, because in our complex world they tend to pop up in the most unexpected places.

Once boundaries are established, and they become places we should not go or things we should not do, and we need to understand why.

The route forward, is where the conflict becomes a balance. When the force of the idea, and the positive weight of the effort and resources, take us around or through the boundaries and towards our goal.

Where do we start? (and ... what is the order we do things in?)

By now, we will have learned a lot together. We will understand why what we are doing is important and why we should not stand still. We will have discovered why it is important to move forward in the way we intend to.

We will also know how to talk about it others, with an understanding of how they need to engage with this conversation. We will have established feasibility. We will know we can move forwards, and what it will take. But we cannot do everything at once. We need to prioritise.

During prioritisation, we aim to make a list of things that need to be done, and the order in which we intend to do them. And we ask the most difficult question: where do we start?

Laying out in front of us, the things that need to be done and making choices, does not mean we lack ambition. It does not mean we do not set the bar high, in fact it is the opposite. It means we set ourselves a number of high bars.

It means we turn over every stone. Push every decision.

Challenge our original assumptions. Lay the plan open in front of ourselves and others and ask honestly and authentically: what we can see now that we might not have seen before?



We have discovered,
and we have reflected.

We are now ready to
execute.



Collaborative Digital Creation

Part 3: Execute.

How will it work?

Whilst we have been planning our purpose, our design and technical teams will have had something else on their mind, and have been working to figure it out.

It is the one question that all our creations have in common, that we ask right at the start.

How will it work?

Software is logical. Processes are logical. Even design as a creative process has structure.

But humans do not always want to follow this logic. Defining how something is going to work, helps to bring these two things closer together. And when there is still a gap, it means we can show people how things are supposed to work.

And then change them if needed.

Defining how something needs to work, is the moment when we begin to bring the idea to life. To give it shape, structure, texture.

It is why the first question a technical expert will ask, is not about purpose or vision. It is about how to make the idea concrete.

How will it work?

It is another test of feasibility. Choosing the right solution, means choosing the solution that can be achieved within the constraints we have established. The end point of this stage is a prototype, or a draft. Something that looks and feels like what we would like to create.

If it is a system, the prototype might show visual style and some functionality. If it is a process, it will be a sketch of where we are going.

It is important because it gives us something to react to. Something to thrash on, and get right, foster a spirit of even greater innovation. Something that helps us to continually refine the idea and the solution.

Something we can see. But not yet something that works.

Will like to do this together, because every decision we make at this stage, will have an impact. The more decisions we make, the more impacts we can make to the end product.

The bigger the impacts we can uncover and solve, the more flexible we will be further into execution.

We make them now, so we don't have to make them under pressure, later.

Inside and out.

Design can mean a different thing to different people.

Most often, design describes what something will look like. How something looks will create an impression, that will inform the beginning of an opinion.

A positive opinion, from those we need to have one, will create intent. Intent will create action, and will be the start of success.

Yet, what something looks like, can just be the start. If we are buying a car, the colour is important. The beauty we see in the style will turn our heads. We might hop in briefly, and feel comfortable.

But what is going on where we cannot see, is equally if not more important. Does it have a good engine? Are the components sourced well, and are they compatible with each other? Was it put together with care, and with expertise? Will it last?

For digital products, these principles are also true, and is all part of the design. How a digital system is put together, or how a physical or virtual asset performs, will be the difference between fleeting enjoyment and long-term success.

This means we spend time at MMC understanding deeply the functionality below the surface as much as we do the aesthetics. We might call it a feature specification, or it could be a list of questions we need to answer.

Understanding this is the bridge to development and creation. It is taking every action, and talking through the user experience we would expect, and the functionality that would deliver that experience.

Understanding the dependencies of a solution, and how all the actions will need to fit together to create value.

Even a presentation, needs the right kind of projector.

It also means we work in the areas that are not always seen or should not be seen. Working with you to make sure security, privacy, technical performance, or compliance are designed into a solution are all part of good design.

And good design, inside and out, is enduring.

Production.

How do we begin to concisely describe the production process by which an idea comes to life?

The pixelated wonder of a digital creation? Whether that be a new workflow, a new place to find assets, a piece of content, or a beautiful and engaging new way of displaying information or a product.

How do we describe the magic, and the mystery of coding? The toil of pixel-perfection? The rigour of a secure architecture? The labour of a video effect or each piece of content?

We aim for our clients to feel the joy of art. We hope for the feeling of a connection, a reaction, the feeling that our work together is a statement to the world.

But we do not aim for this to feel like magic or mystery. Because behind this art is craft.

By working with MMC, you are working with a group of experts, who have chosen to specialise in technical or creative work.

Production, or development, is a big step in the process. We aim to produce in the same collaborative way that we have worked with you so far.

We break down a build or production into steps, starting with a minimal viable product and using our discovery, priorities, functionality documentation and design.

The minimal viable product, is a first working version of an application. For other digital assets, it might be the first draft of an infographic, or the first draft of a strategy deck.

From here, we aim to iterate and build on each iteration. To build on feedback, and to build functionality, step by step. At each stage, we release to you what we have created, so that we can continue this cycle of creation and feedback.

It is a constant process of problem solving, forward motion, until gradually a solution begins to come to life. We build at pace, but not without planned moments to breathe and reflect. To check our design, to test along the way, to review our code.

We work collaboratively because we aim to have no mystery. No rabbits-out-of-hats, and no secret bunkers.

We are also there to support. With security, privacy, data, technologies, front-ends, back-ends, databases, UX, clouds, roadmaps. We can explain these to you, or can help you with your internal discussions.

We are all experts together, and at the end, we can stand back not individually but in a team, and say: we made that.

Test, test, test.

One of our favourite moments is the 'go-live'. The release of a piece of digital creative – from the deployment brand-new complex application, to a feature update, a presentation, to designing something that is slightly less blue than it was before.

Releasing anything, carries risk. It's our job on a daily basis to manage that risk.

Deploying a system is also the end of the journey. It is the big shipping moment of all of our ideas that have been made real.

If it is code, it happens with the push of that metaphorical red button.

If it is an idea, it might be the 'send' button. It might be the upload and release of visual creative. It might be a moment, together with a group, delivering an idea.

We will help you to mitigate this risk. We will help with the nerves. We can't get rid of them altogether, because it is normal and it is human. It is the natural feelings we have when we share something that we've put so much of ourselves into. Putting it 'out there'.

We help firstly through preparation. To get to the point of release, a creation will have passed through the hands of many people to perform tests.

We are rigorous, we perform dry runs. We believe in pre-meetings to meetings. Testing is something that happens through the whole process, not just at the end.

We believe in supporting each other, our partners, and our clients when we ship. Even if you have done all your preparation, and are confident in the click. Even if the deployment of code is an automated process, there can always be circumstances you can't cover.

When these events happen it's not about the situation but how you react to it and how we support each other.

For all the potential risk that could happen, managing this correctly lets you focus on what is important – the pride and accomplishment of what has been produced, the happiness in knowing you've contributed with

something to help make a positive difference.

That's what drives us when creating and sharing.

How do we tell everyone?

When we are creating positive change, we commit to bringing honesty in what we say. Understanding why we have made a special case to tell certain people about what we are doing, is the first step in this search for authenticity.

At this point, we will know the main groups of people that we would like to communicate with. We will have earmarked them when we discovered who our idea was for. What we now need to do, is look back at that list. And understand why we are having a conversation.

We will have goals for our communication that are practical, so that the right people know about what we are creating in order to know it exists. We will have some that are more intangible, and might be because we need to build a consensus, persuade, and even at times disagree.

All these acts should be done visibly, and with intention.

What is important to the people we choose to tell? What promises can we make, and keep? How do they like to receive information, and how often? And what do we need to achieve this?

Set expectations. Communicate authentically.

If a change is important enough to make, then it needs to come with authenticity in action and words, even if what we have to do and say is difficult.

Maintenance.

Change is constant.

The future will continue to invade our work, even after we think we have finished. The end of a production phase, marks the beginning of a different type of relationship.

Just like the world itself, our solution cannot stand still. Technology changes, or new thought appears, that creates the need to change what we have created.

We aim to make you as self-sufficient as possible, but we prepare to support you when it is needed.

We call this support 'maintenance', because it creates a posture of continuity. Just like physical products require touch-ups, digital products may also require updates and changes to make sure that we maintain a secure, current solution.

It may be as small as maintaining the security of the application to stay ahead of the innovation of threats.

It may also be that we imagine new features and innovations. The world of ideas never stands still, and our minds are unlikely to stand still either. We can discover again and create something new that builds on the present, to create a brand new version of the future once again.

At MMC, we ask to reserve time for maintenance, and we agree together what is necessary.

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New
compared
to what?

You are
ready.

... let's go.

If what you have read motivates you to talk more,
we'd love to connect here:

You can contact us here:

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You can read more about what we do, and how we do it via our website:

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