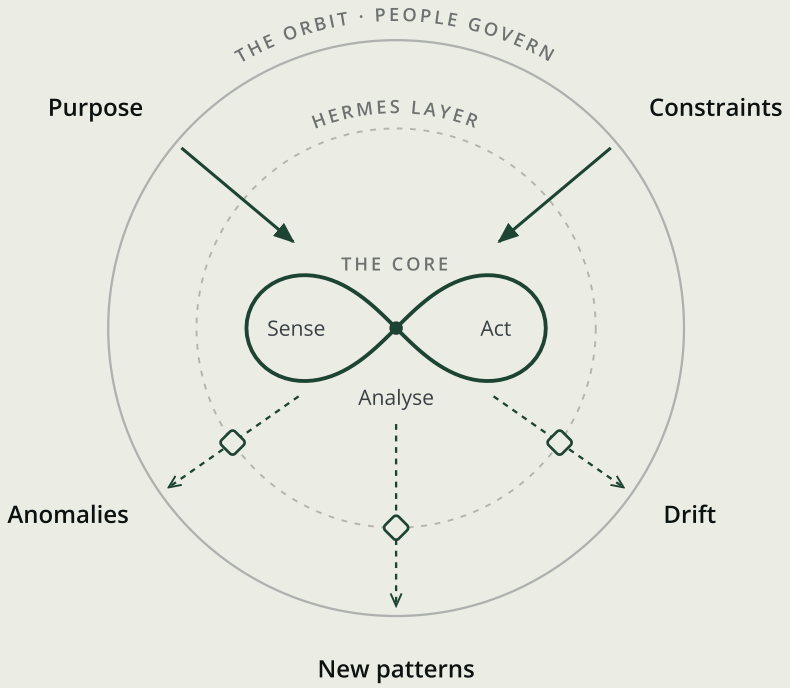
ADVISORY FROM SKYETEC

ORBIT

From delegating tasks to delegating goals.

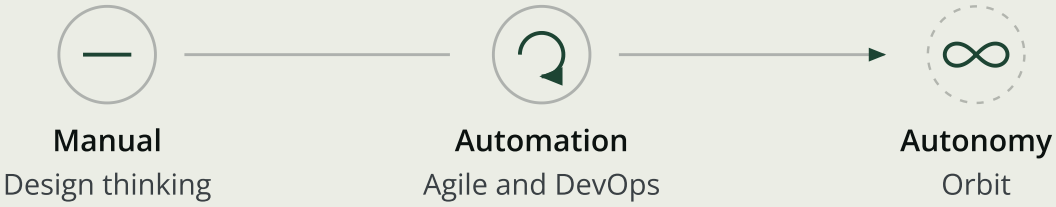
The frameworks we innovate by were made for people doing every step. When systems find the way themselves, we need a new way to govern. Orbit is our model for it: machines execute in the core, and people govern from the orbit around it.



Based on the article "The Orbit: Governing Autonomous Systems in the Post-Design Thinking Era" by Pål Machulla.

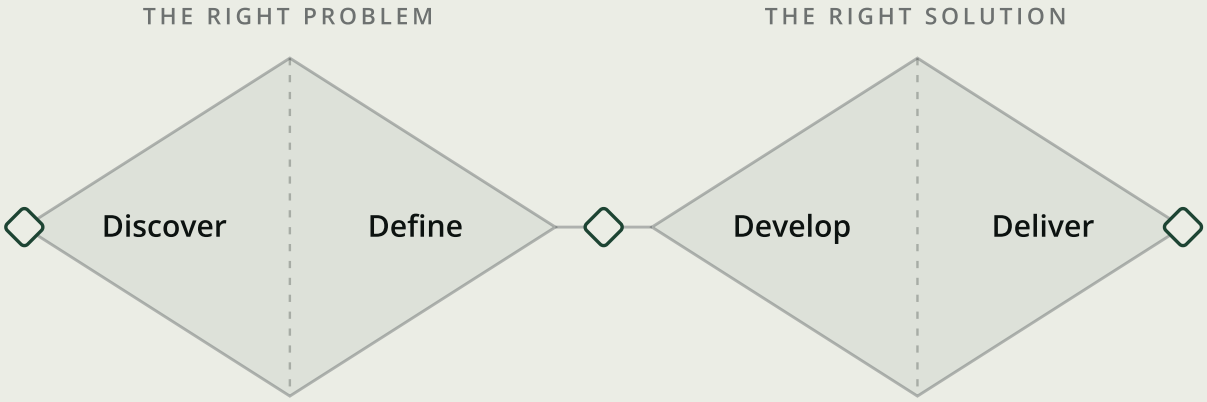
Every shift has demanded a new way to govern

The history of innovation frameworks is a story of speed. Design thinking mastered the manual era, where people ideated, prototyped and iterated. Agile and DevOps brought automation and faster feedback loops, but still directed by people. Now we are crossing into autonomy, and the frameworks have not caught up.



Design thinking and the Double Diamond

The Design Council's Double Diamond, with its phases discover, define, develop and deliver, gave cross-functional teams a shared grammar. A researcher and an engineer could point to the same diagram and see where they stood relative to each other. Its strength was not the method itself, but that it made collaboration possible.



People review every transition

Human-centred design added that you cannot think your way to good products. You have to loop your way there: build, test, learn, repeat. Reality has veto power. The basic shape held for two decades, through design sprints and Lean Startup too: diverge to explore, converge to decide, with people curating every transition.

Automation is not autonomy

Automation

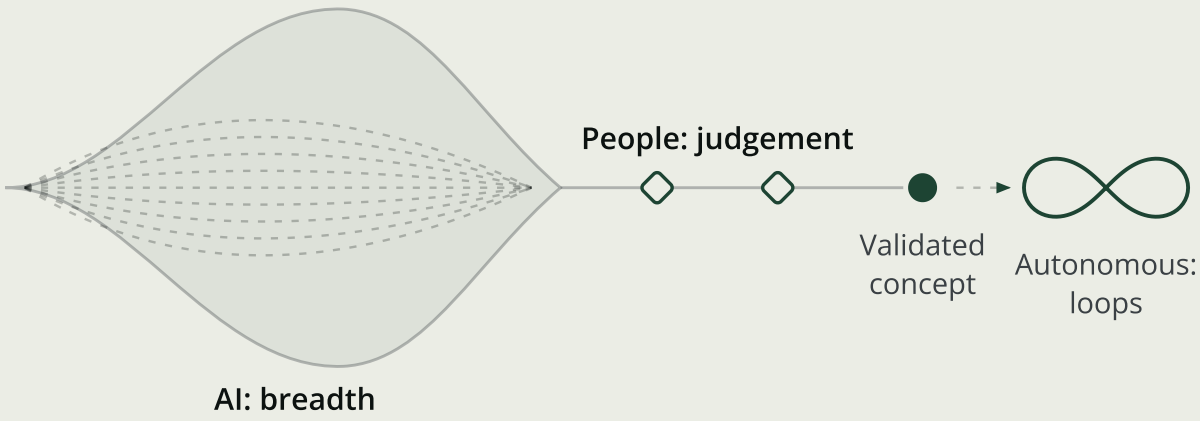
Encoding a known path. You study how people do a task, formalise the steps and let the machine follow them faster and cheaper. The path is still drawn by people. This is what many still mean by AI transformation: faster Double Diamonds.

Autonomy

An autonomous system does not follow a path, it finds paths. You specify the destination, or the constraints that define acceptable destinations, and the system navigates terrain nobody has mapped. The question becomes what happens when the process itself is discovered by the machine.

The Stingray model, and where it breaks

Board of Innovation's Stingray model is an honest attempt to update the framework for generative AI. AI handles the wide, generative phases (the wings), and people handle the converging phases where you judge and choose (the tail). Machines excel at breadth, people at judgement.



Endpoint or loop

The tail ends in a validated concept that gets shipped. Autonomous systems don't end, they loop: deployed, measured, evolved and redeployed. There is no final version.

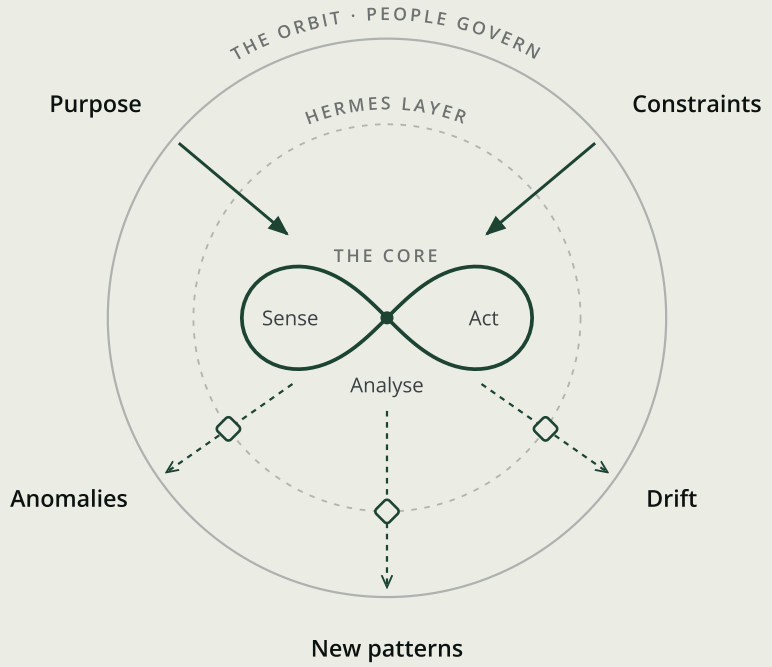
People at the gates

That works when a cycle takes days or weeks. When it takes minutes, nobody can curate it all. The bottleneck doesn't slow down gracefully, it breaks.

The question is not how to make people faster curators, but how their role has to change.

Orbit: the core and the orbit

Orbit is not a replacement for design thinking, but a successor for an era where execution is commoditised and imagination becomes the scarce input. The model has two parts in dynamic relationship, with a translating layer between them.



The core

A high-velocity loop, like a figure eight in perpetual motion: sense, analyse, act, again and again, at machine speed. No person touches it directly. The core works deductively: from premises such as constraints, objectives and current state, to action, with the same consistency every time.

The orbit

A slower, wider ring around the core. This is where people govern: intent, systemic thinking and constraints. The orbit doesn't do the work, it shapes the space in which work happens. The orbit works inductively: from particulars, anomalies and patterns to new hypotheses and updated constraints.

The orbit doesn't send instructions ("do X"), but constraints ("optimise within these boundaries") and purpose ("this is what we are ultimately trying to achieve"). The core figures out the how. The orbit defines the why, and within what limits. The two run at different speeds for good reason: deduction can be parallelised and accelerated, while induction needs time and context.

Signals up, through the Hermes layer

The orbit can’t govern what it can’t sense. Raw telemetry would overwhelm any leadership team, so a layer is needed to translate between machine speed and human speed. We call it the Hermes layer, after the messenger between gods and mortals. It interprets, not just summarises. Three kinds of signal must flow upward:

- **Anomalies**
  When constraints conflict, and the current rules produce no satisfying solution. An invitation to reconsider the premises.
- **Emergent patterns**
  When the system reveals something unexpected about the problem. The territory differs from the map.
- **Drift**
  When many small optimisations have moved the system far from the original intent, without any single step being wrong.

When speed outpaces real-time governance

By the time you have deliberated on a strategic question, the system has iterated through thousands of states. Three responses, used in combination:



Throttled domains

Where stakes are high, such as safety, legal exposure and brand risk, the loop is slowed deliberately. You accept the efficiency loss in exchange for time to deliberate.



Wide guardrails

Where stakes are lower, broad constraints are set upfront and the core explores freely. You intervene when drift signals show the system approaching the boundaries. It demands imagining all the ways optimisation might reach the goal the wrong way.



Augmented deliberation

In the strategic middle ground, the person governing gets AI help with sense-making, not execution: scenarios, simulated consequences and historical analogies. The person still makes the decision.

The art becomes knowing which mode fits where. That judgement may be the most irreducibly human function in the system.

Trust without presence

Advisory has sold human judgement, verified by someone being in the room. When people move to the orbit, those signs disappear. Audit trails give accountability afterwards, but are rarely read. Outcome contracts fit poorly where results take years. More promising is transparency: making the Hermes layer visible to the client, with anomalies, drift and explained decisions, so trust comes from comprehension. In the end it is transferred trust: the client trusts the firm, and the firm stands behind its system. That requires internal governance rigorous enough to warrant the bet.

A new role: the imagination governor

The Double Diamond created the T-shaped professional. Orbit creates demand for a different profile: someone who defines constraints creatively enough to bound pathological optimisation, interprets signals well enough to know when intervention matters, and carries enough credibility to transfer trust from person to system. Not someone writing instructions for each cycle inside the loop, but someone who defines the possibility space. It takes structured imagination: exploring futures, consequences and failure modes before they happen.

How we use Orbit

Direction

From planning every step → to setting the direction, goals and limits.

Execution

From doing the work yourself → to systems acting within the space that has been agreed.

Feedback

From reporting afterwards → to feedback that makes deviations, new patterns and goal drift visible along the way.

In Forsprang, the leadership team practises exactly this: seeing the possibilities, setting direction and limits, and imagining what could happen several moves ahead. **skyetec.ai/en/advisory**

Read the full article: medium.com/@pal.machulla

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