Data Strategy development through design approach

Anne-Marie Sherkle

22nd May 2025

Purpose & Vision

Purpose: The purpose of the Department of Education's 2024-27 Data Strategy is to provide considered, intentional direction for action, informed by an understanding of our context, and the needs and experiences of department staff and the wider education community.

Vision: An education data culture in which trusted, well-governed, accessible data is understood, supported and leveraged for the benefit of those who learn, teach and lead across the sector.

Why did we use design approach?

- Timing, Design Principles for Government in Ireland and the Action Plan for Designing Better Public Services

- Support of cross government initiative & support of the Central Design Unit in DEPNDER throughout

- Value, inherent value of design lead approach

- Importance of strategy to set the path for customer centric solutions

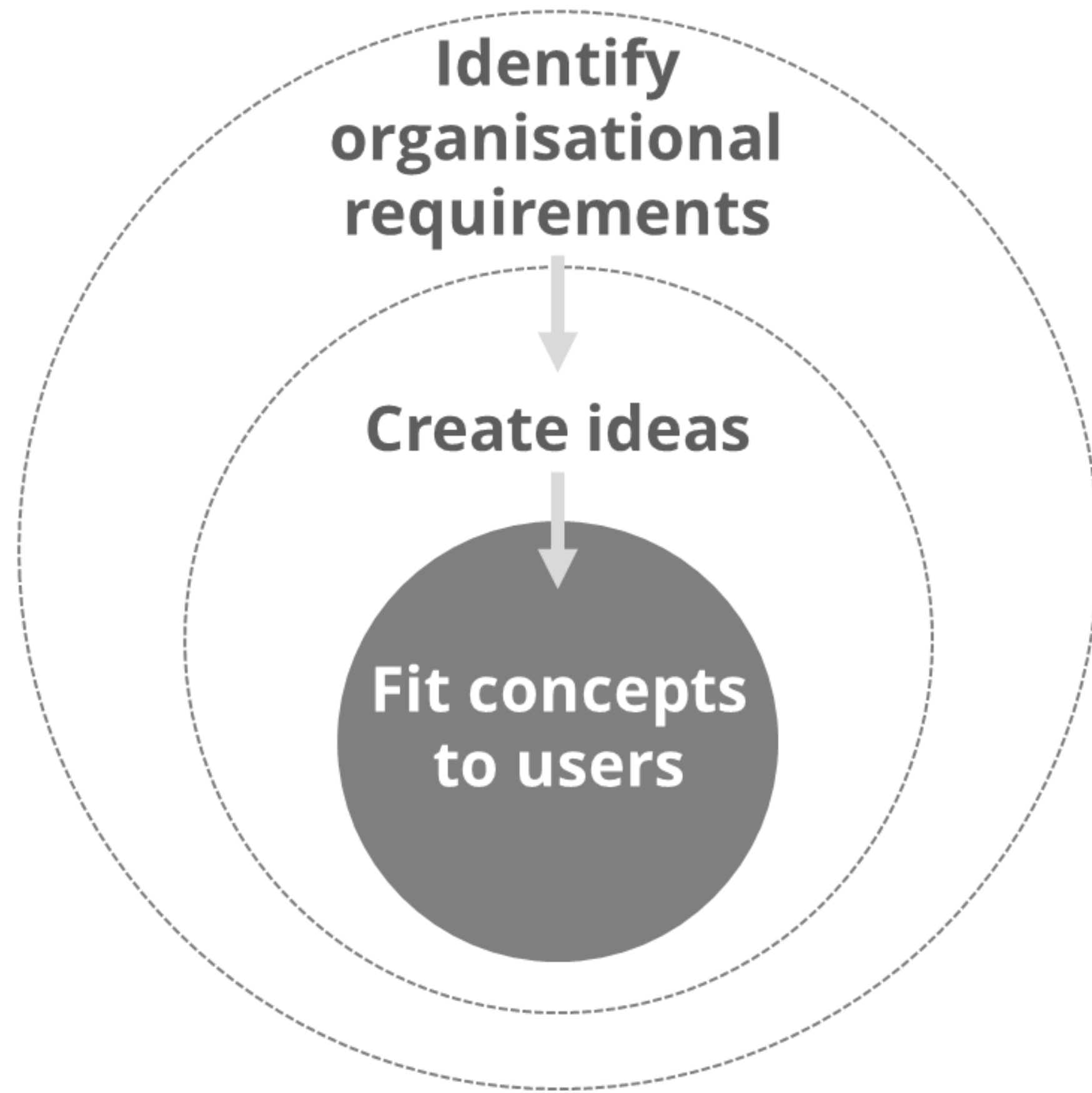Expectations have accelerated

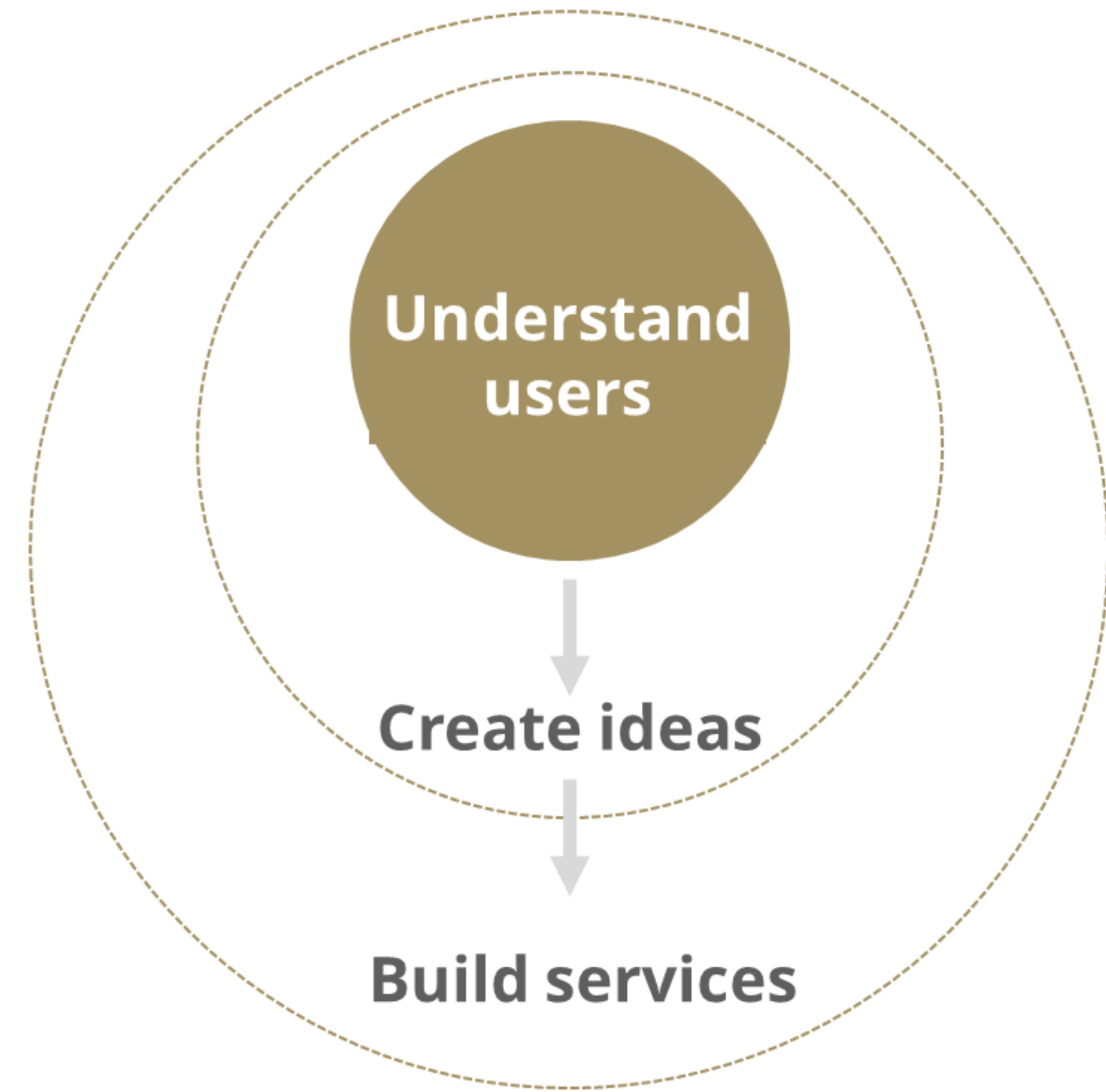Design Thinking is really just a **structured way of solving problems** — but instead of guessing or assuming, we start with **the people who actually use the service**
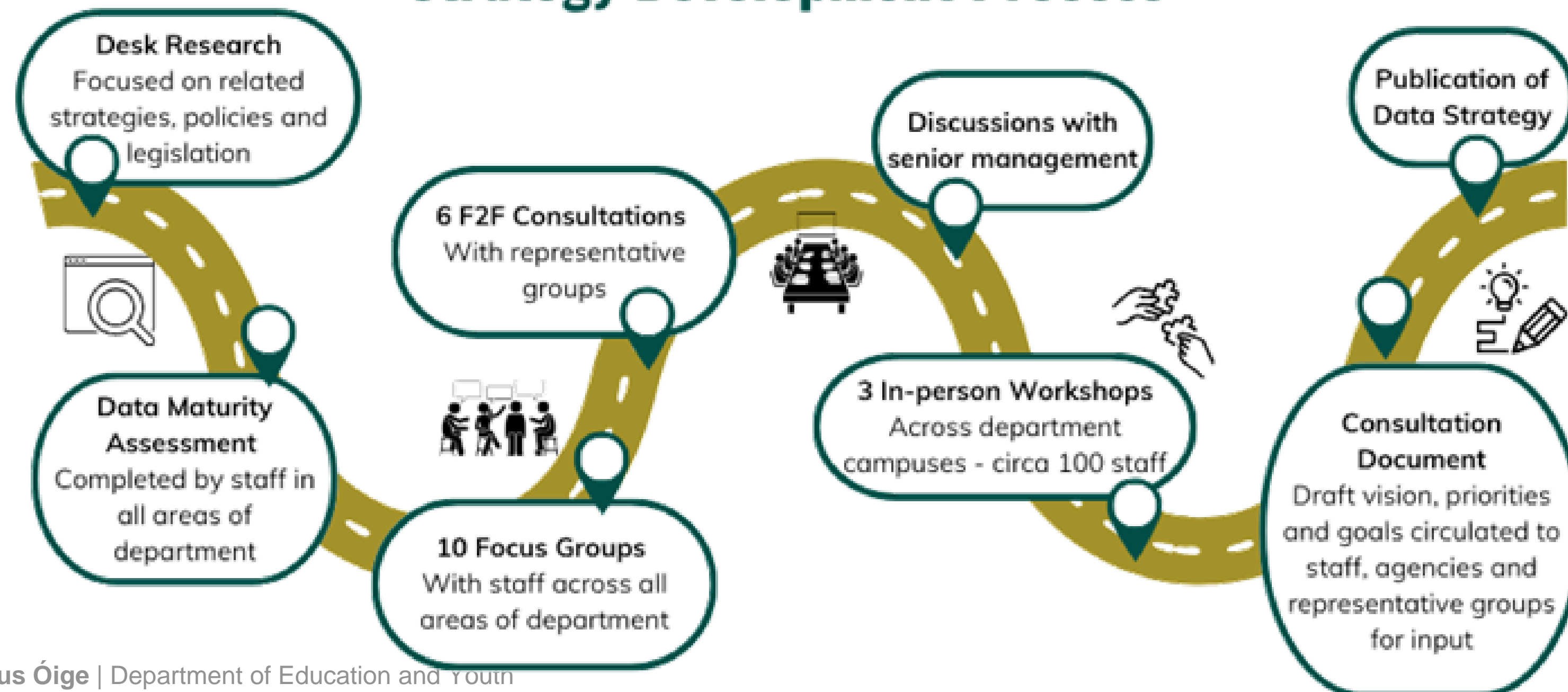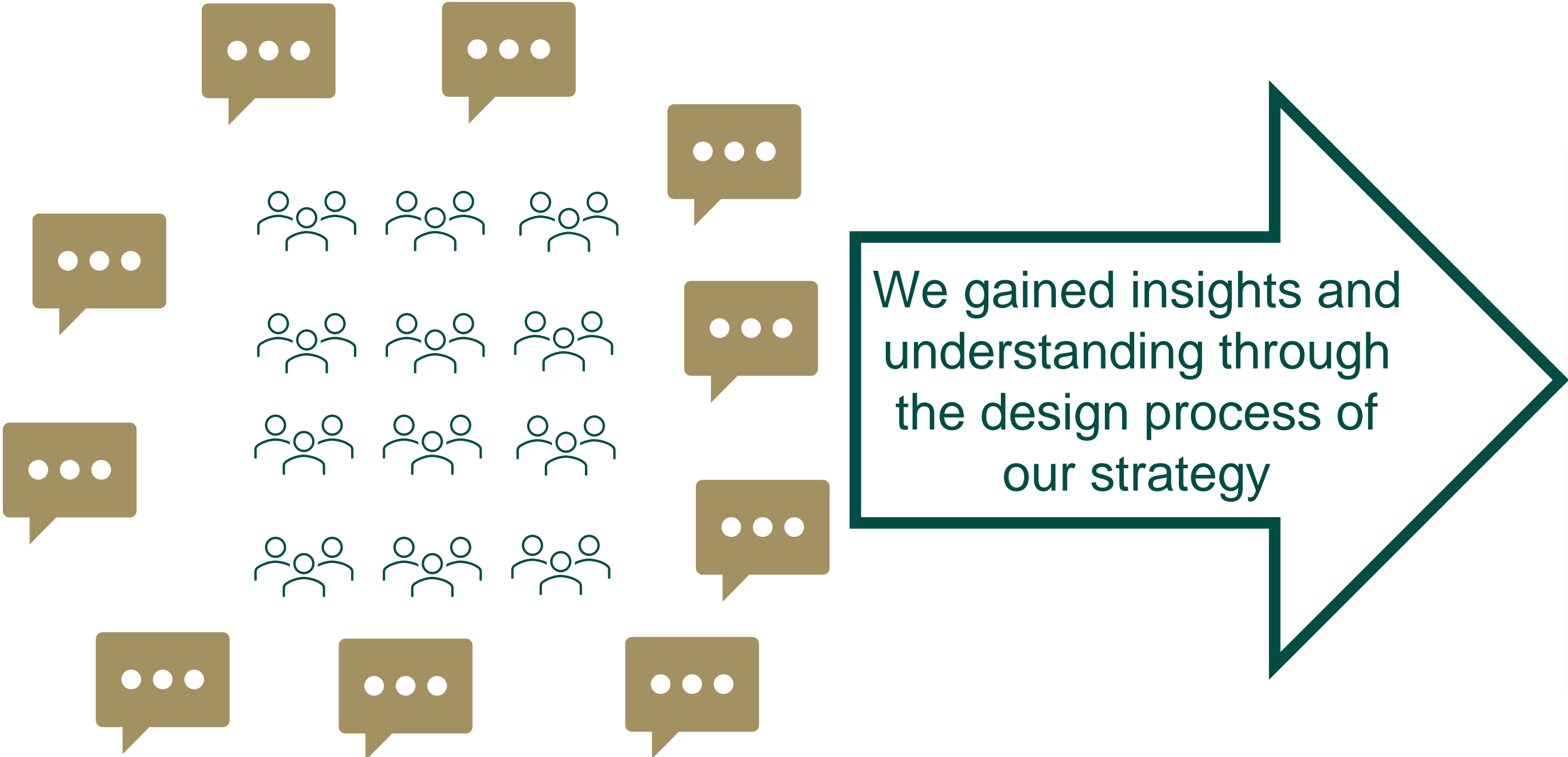
Traditional Problem-Solving Approach

Identify organisational requirements
↓
Create ideas
↓
Fit concepts to users

Human-Centred Design Approach

Understand users
↓
Create ideas
↓
Build services

Phases of Typical Design Process

DISCOVER

Delve deep to truly understand the challenge and resisting assumptions. Engage and empathise with those directly affected to gain genuine insights.

Use the insights gathered during discovery to reframe the challenge, seeing it from new perspectives and highlighting its core essence.

DEFINE

DEVELOP

Address the defined problems by brainstorming diverse solutions. Seek inspiration from various sources and collaborate with a diverse group of individuals for co-design

Prototype the devised solutions on a small scale, discarding what doesn't resonate and refining what promises to make a meaningful impact.

DELIVER

Strategy Development Process

Desk Research
Focused on related strategies, policies and legislation

Data Maturity Assessment
Completed by staff in all areas of department

6 F2F Consultations
With representative groups

10 Focus Groups
With staff across all areas of department

Discussions with senior management

3 In-person Workshops
Across department campuses - circa 100 staff

Publication of Data Strategy

Consultation Document
Draft vision, priorities and goals circulated to staff, agencies and representative groups for input

Feedback session

We gained insights and understanding through the design process of our strategy

Data Strategy 2024-27

Don't know what data the dept has

Can be difficult to find single, reliable 'source of truth'

Not sure where to go to get the data needed

Our Stakeholders

An underlying challenge…

Key attribute of a School

School Type

School

School Type means Primary, Post Primary or Special School

School Type means whether is a Gaelscoil or not

School Type means what Ethos the School is

School Type means whether School is a DEIS School or not

School Type means Secondary, Vocational, Community, Comprehensive, or Primary

School Type means whether is Fee Paying or not

School Type means whether is located in Urban or Rural area

School Type means whether is Boys, Girls or Mixed

School Type means ….

Just ONE example of ONE attribute – shows how difficult it can be for business users to communicate and talk to each other about our key data!

Addressing this challenge through the strategy implementation process

- Data Catalogue

- Most critical data areas

- Common definitions

- Business Glossary

- Align to CSO standards

- Develop data quality monitoring assurance

What value will this bring

✓ Allow business users to have **more meaningful conversations** about their **key organisational data**

✓ Provide a **trusted and accessible place** where business can go to find out about our most critical data

✓ Enhance our **decision making capabilities**

✓ Enable **development of data standards** for key organisational data so these can be included in new systems

✓ Better **facilitate cross collaboration** with other public sector organisations

✓ First **step to getting our data 'AI Ready'** so we are better placed to leverage innovation