

Ethical Designer's Dilemma

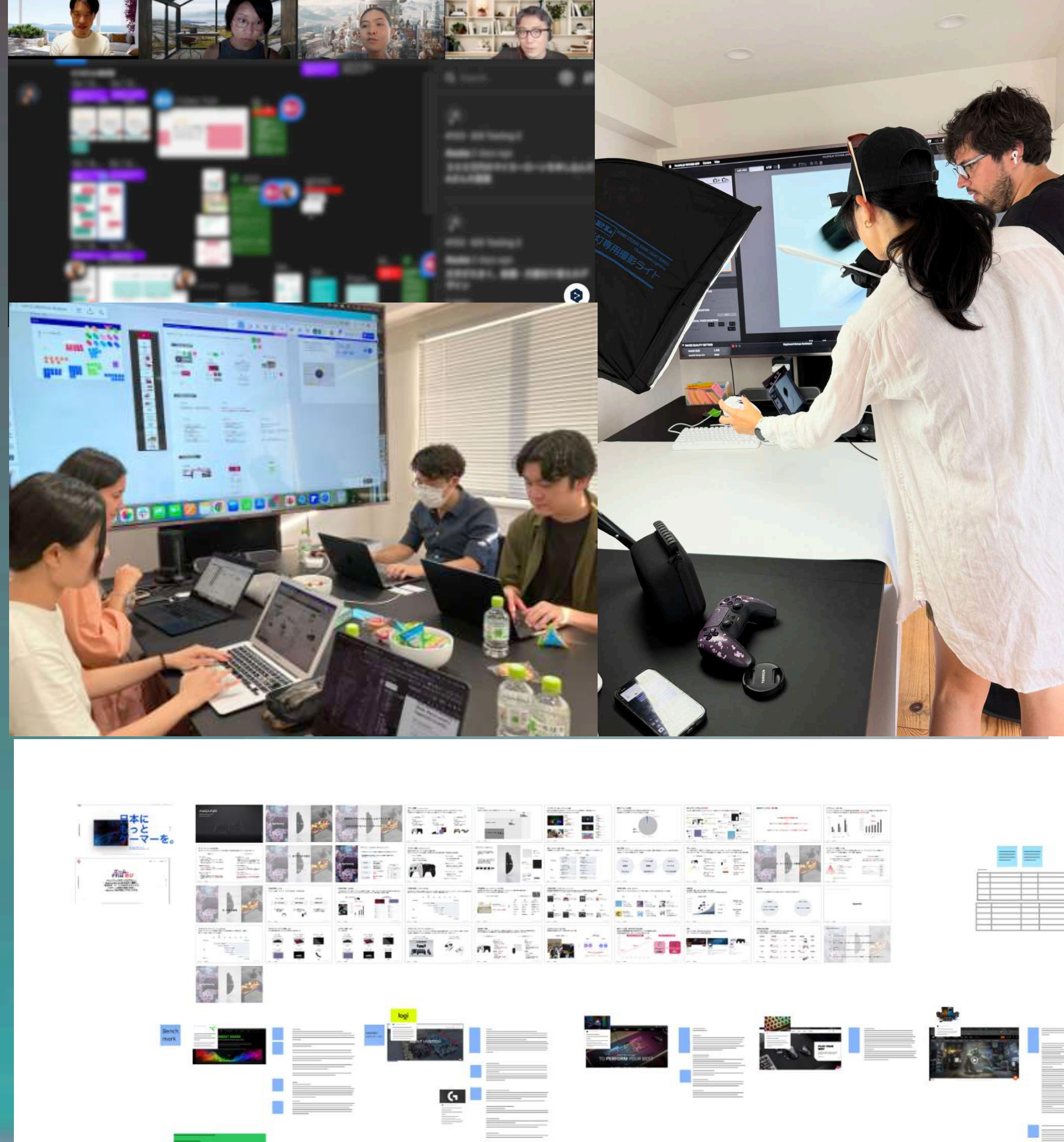
The ROI of Ethical Design and Its Challenges in a
Growth-Obsessed World

Hello I am Asuka

I work in **D4V - Venture Capital** with partnership with IDEO as a design research director supporting early staged ventures in **creating human-centric products and services** that drive business growth

Every day, I work with
inspiring startups to make
the world better through
human-centered design.

**Ethical design is essential,
as it is deeply tied to
human centrality.**



From funding to trust, **Ethical ROI is increasingly acknowledged.**

Funding Gate

88% of LPs demand AI- and data-specific due diligence questions before funding (Venture ESG 2025).

Trust as Growth

83% of consumers say data protection is critical to earning their trust (PwC 2024)

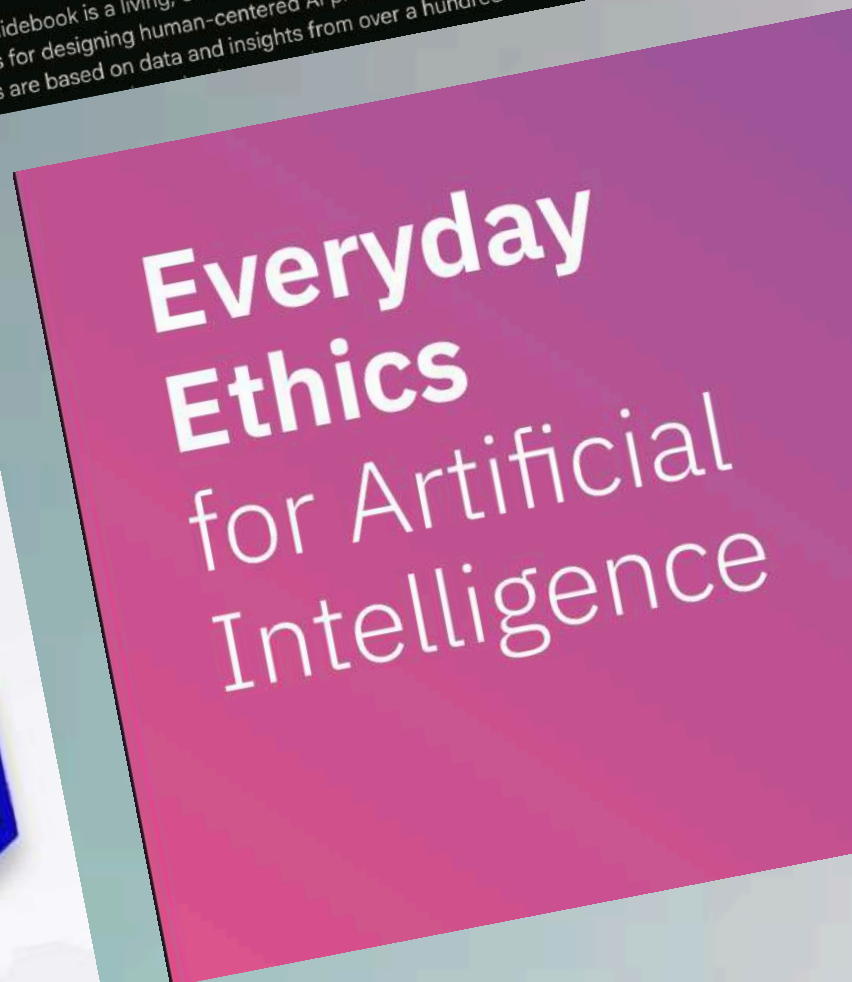
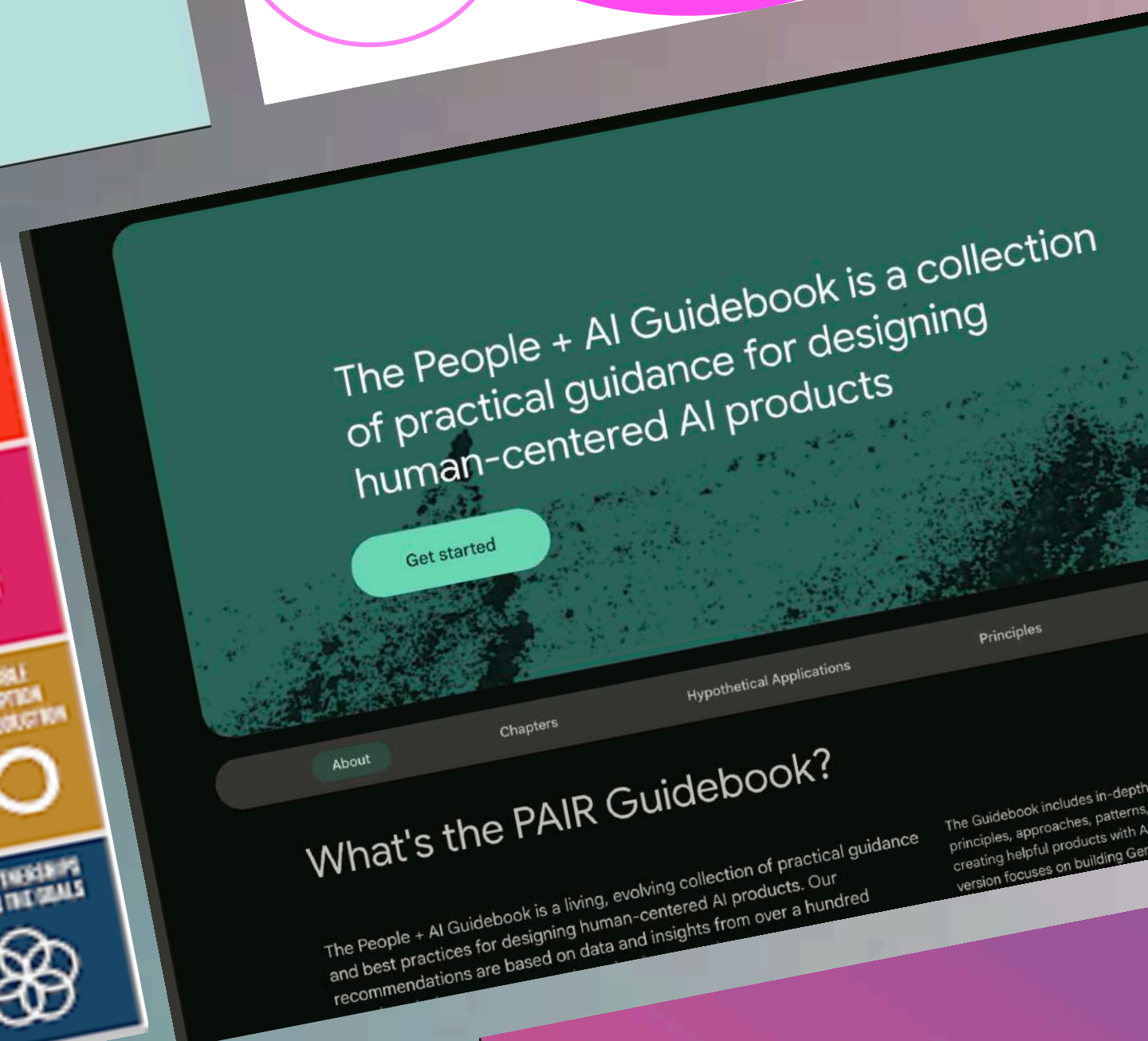
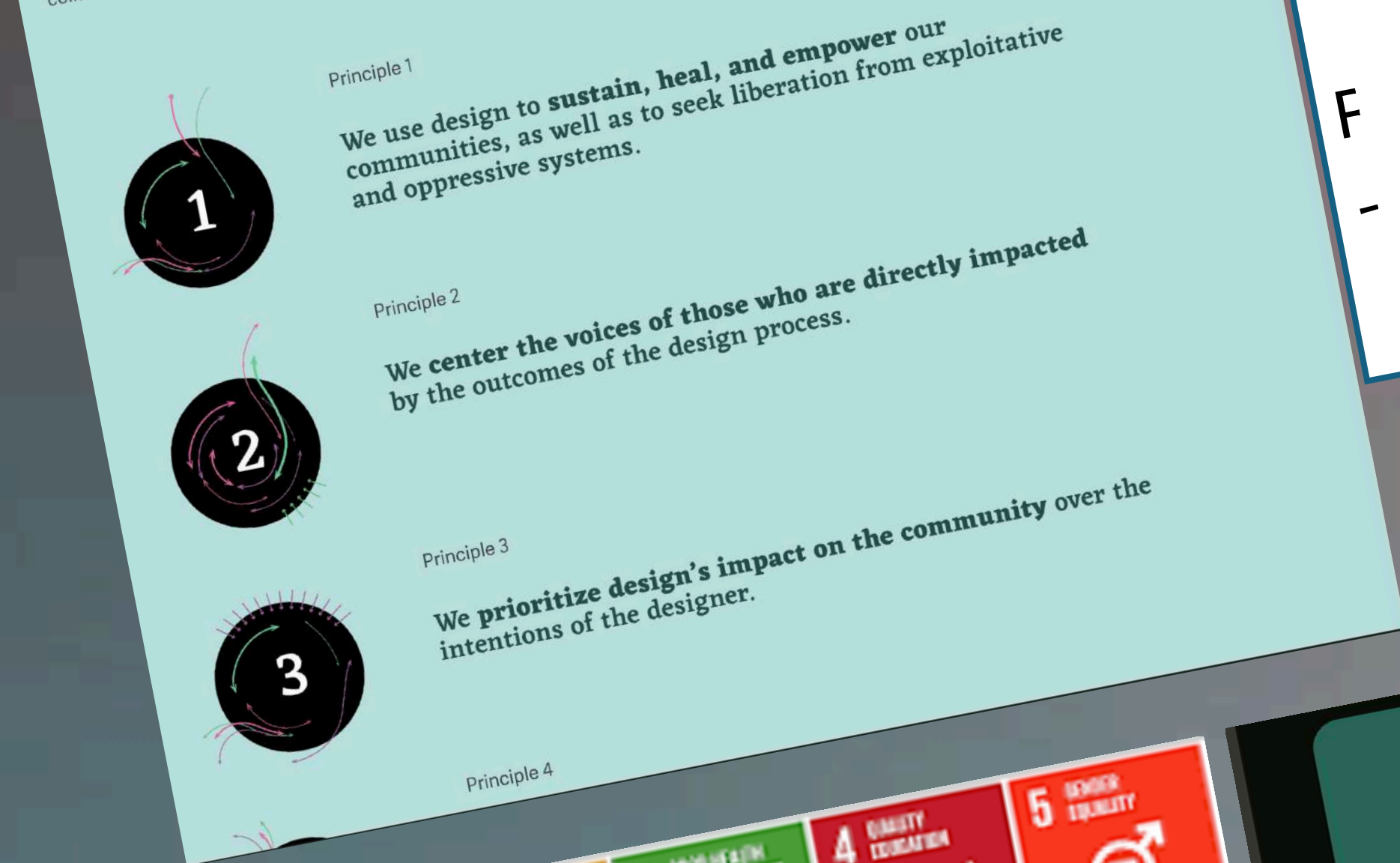
Cost of Governance

Meta's €1.2B GDPR fine (2023) = 1.5% of annual revenue; \$30B market cap drop in 48 hrs

Cost of Delay

Fixing a defect in production is up to 100× more expensive than fixing it earlier (IBM).

Multiple guidelines have been created to support the implementations of ethics



My Dilemma

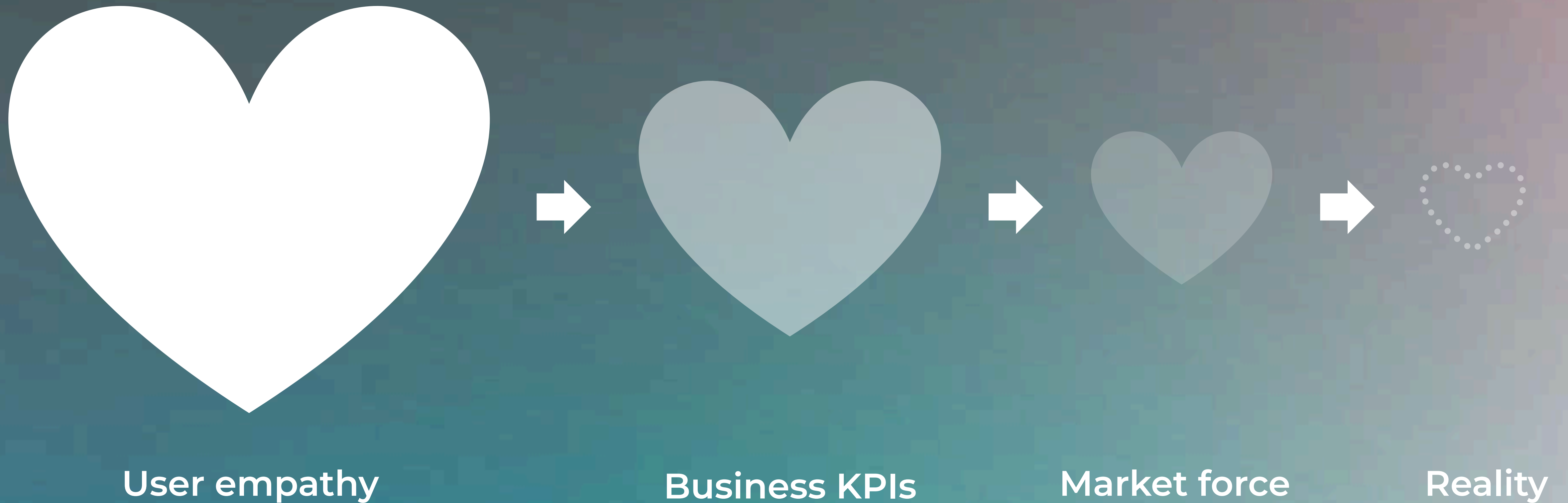


Hey Asuka.
Churn rate went up 3%.
Revert the transparent
cancellation flow back
to the old version

A man with dark hair, wearing a light blue dress shirt and a patterned tie, is sitting at a desk in a high-rise office. He is holding a black mobile phone to his ear with his right hand. The office has large windows in the background showing a city skyline with various skyscrapers. On the desk, there are some papers and a computer monitor is partially visible on the right. The overall lighting is bright, suggesting daytime.

SHOW ME THE MONEY!

The Designer's Journey from Hero to Zero



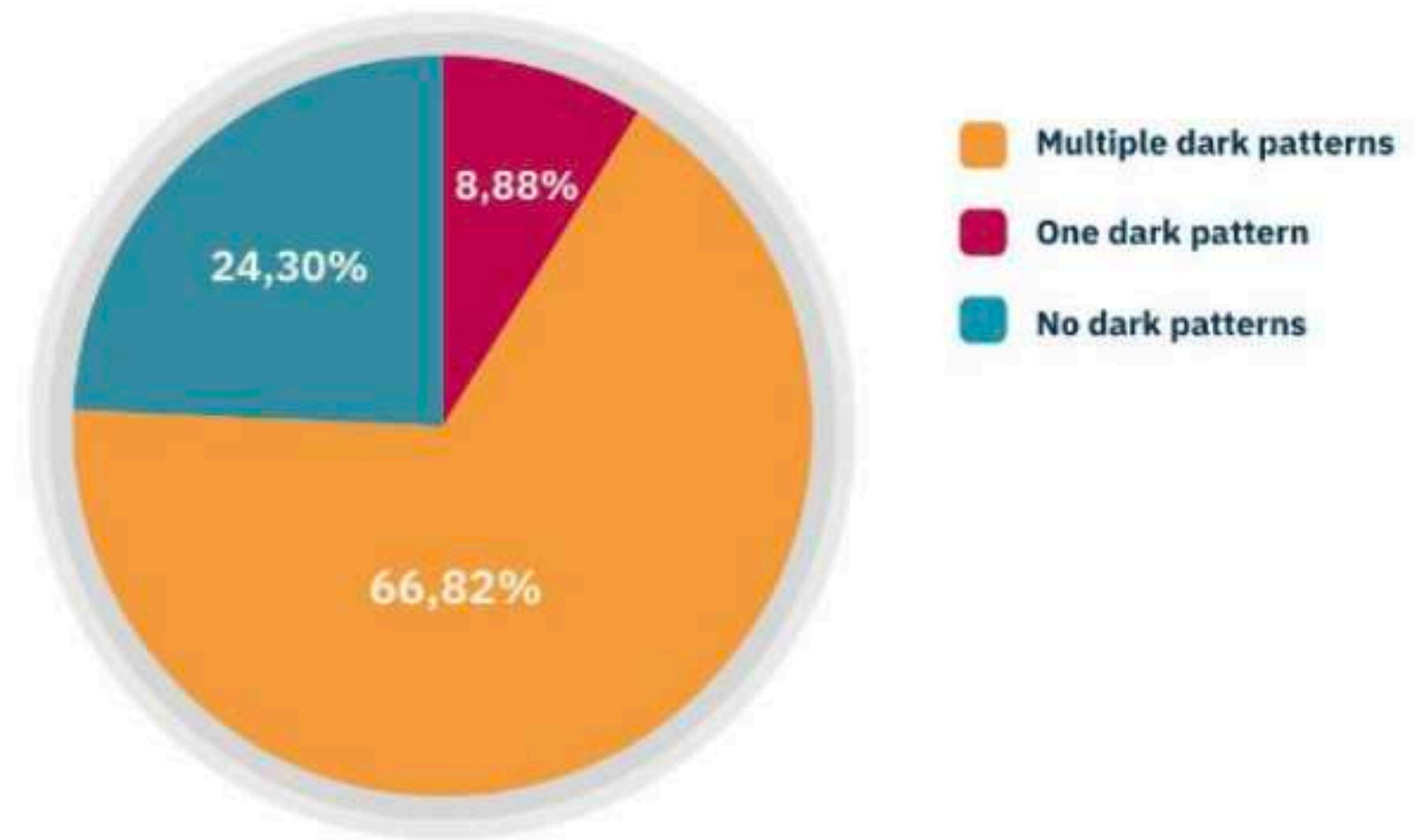
**My success rate in ethical
standard implementation
proposal 1/23**

And it was not only me

Over 75% of websites use deceptive design tricks

Those include features to navigate into unwanted subscriptions, sharing personal data, or hard-to-cancel purchases

NUMBER OF DARK PATTERNS FOUND



Why is ethical design so hard ?

My analysis after 22 failed human-central design proposals

Startups recognize the importance of ethics, but their environments make it hard to put into practice

Recognize importance

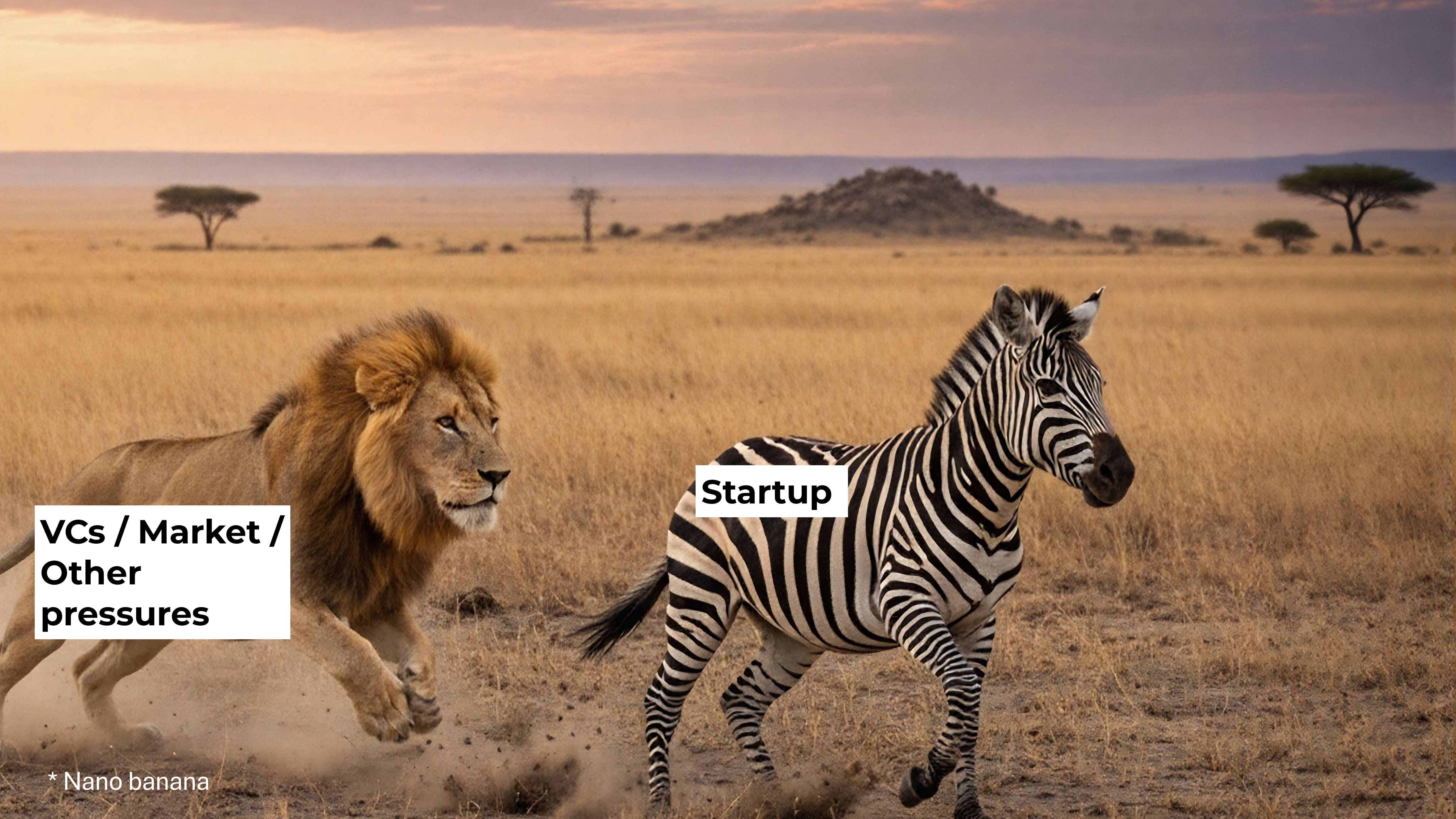
We found company
for the mission to
improve the world

No resource, no time

With scarce
resources, only
business-critical
tasks survive

External pressure

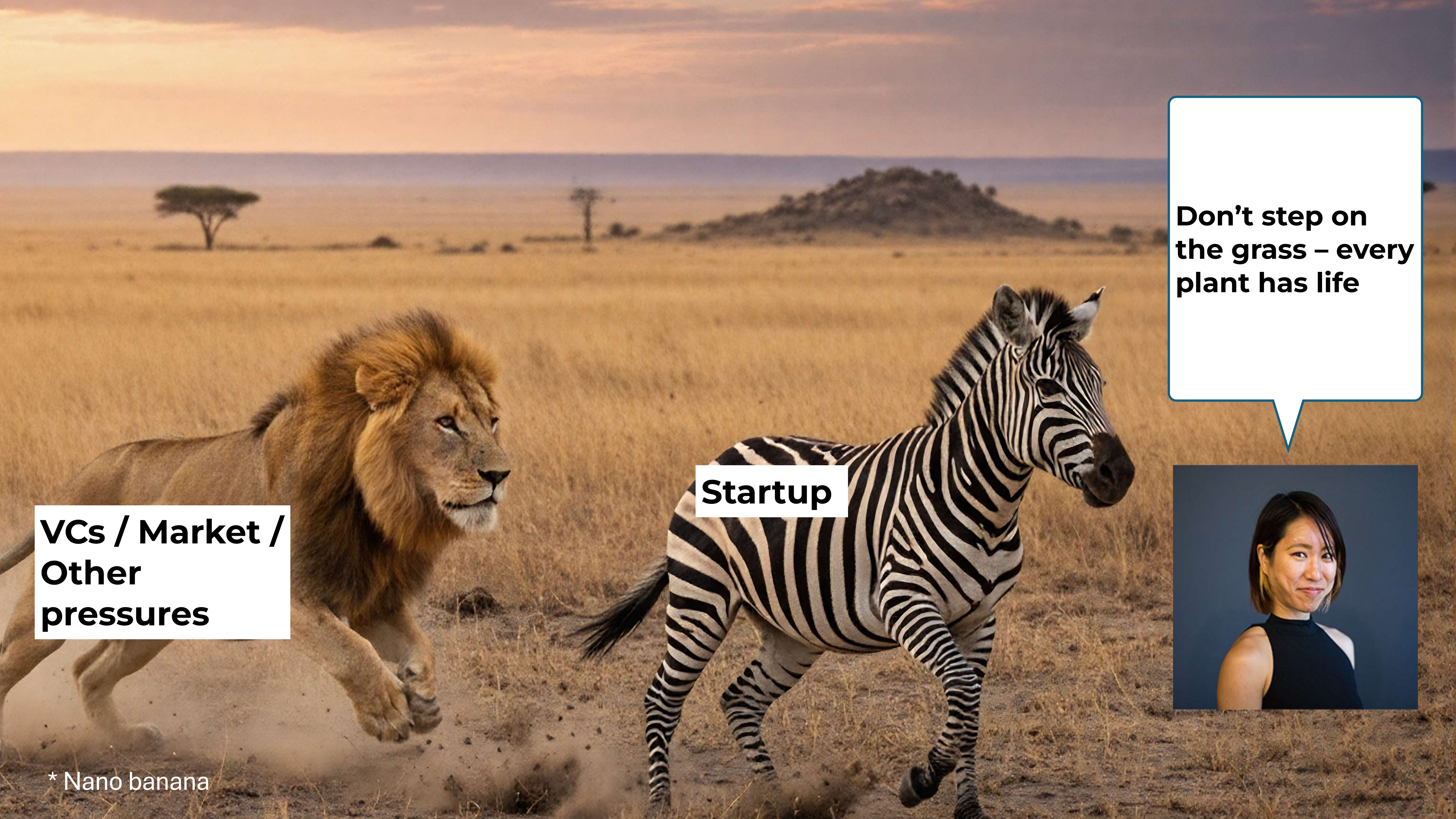
Standing alone
against competitors
or investors?
Impossible



**VCs / Market /
Other
pressures**

Startup

* Nano banana



**VCs / Market /
Other
pressures**

Startup

**Don't step on
the grass – every
plant has life**



However, started to see some
weak sign of possibilities

**When survival
demands ethics,
it gets prioritized**

Ethic as survival capital



Examples of Ethic as survival capital I have observed

Trust Reserve

When growth slowed, ethics kept customer trust

Signal for Differentiation

To win hires and funding, ethics set us apart

Climate Adaptation

As rules kept shifting, ethics became the rule we followed

Fuel for Endurance

In tough times, ethics gave the team strength to keep going

In startups, lean is everything

Minimal variable ethics

Find the right theme, at the right time

Tie human-centric focus directly to the business's current priorities

Start small, embed in what exists

Integrate ethical or human-centric considerations into ongoing projects, rather than launching new ones

Visualize the results

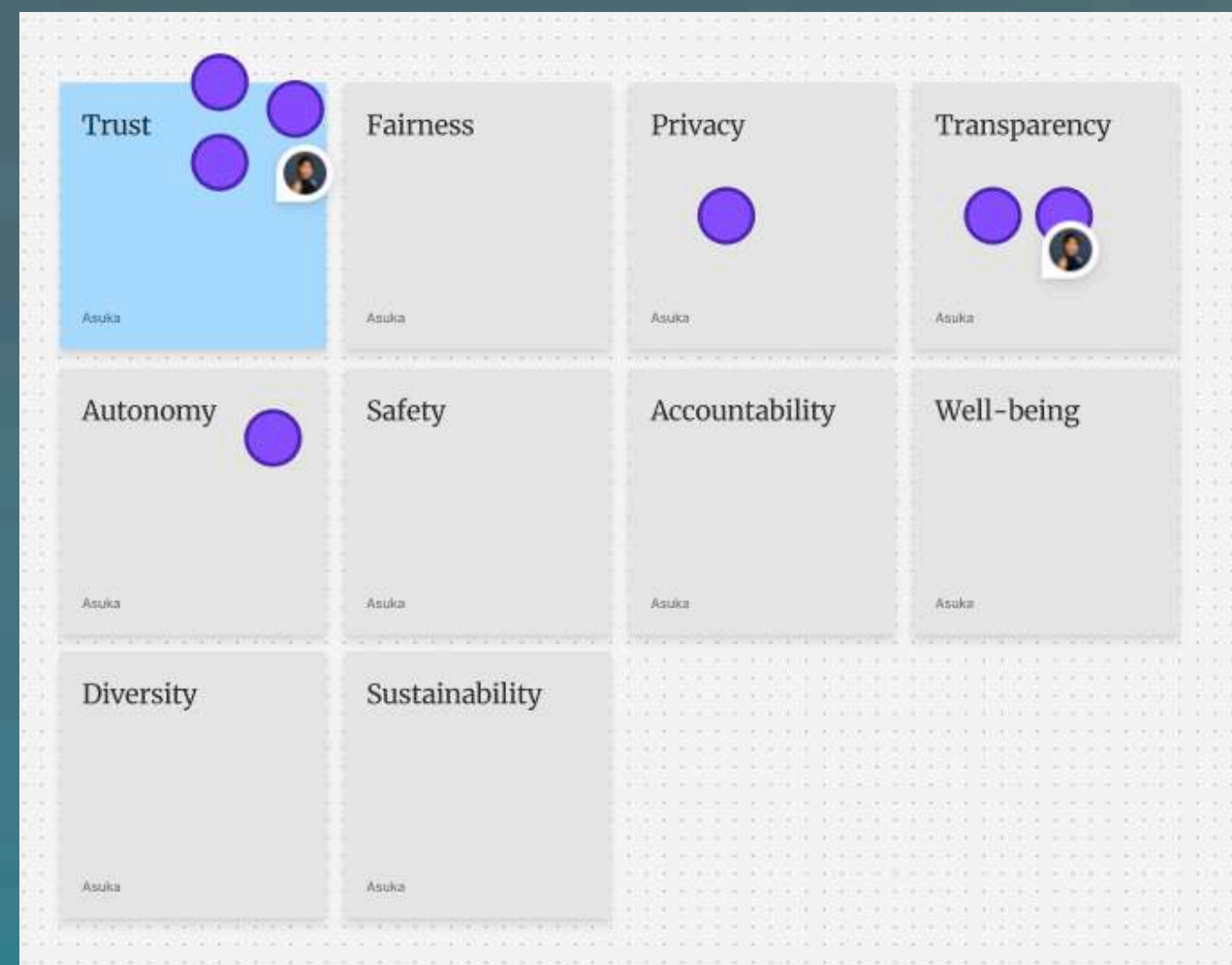
Capture and share evidence of impact—whether numbers, stories, or simple recordings—to make change tangible

🎉 Ethical design in progress 🎉

What we are working on

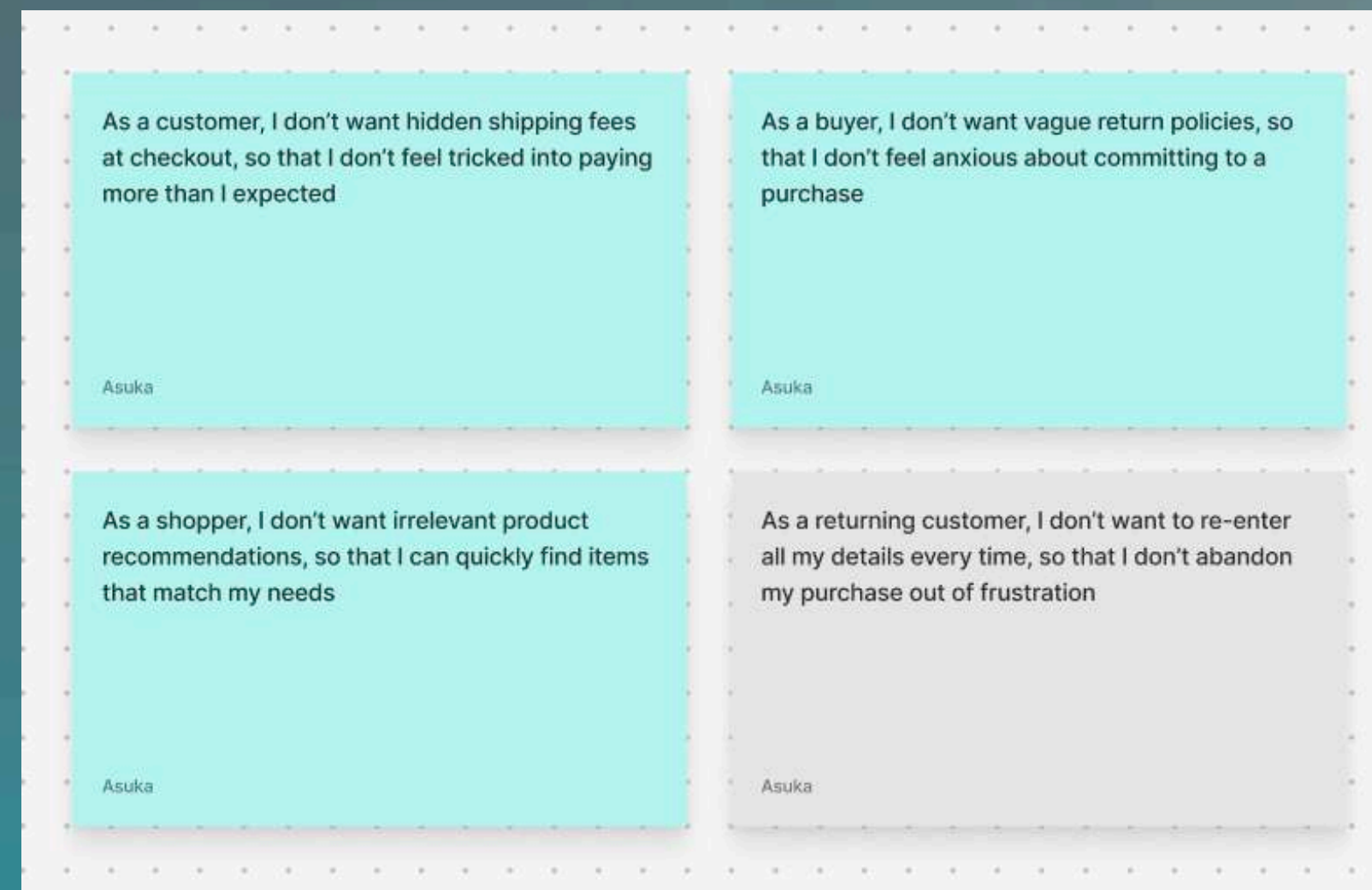
Find the theme

**Choose one theme
Instead of several**



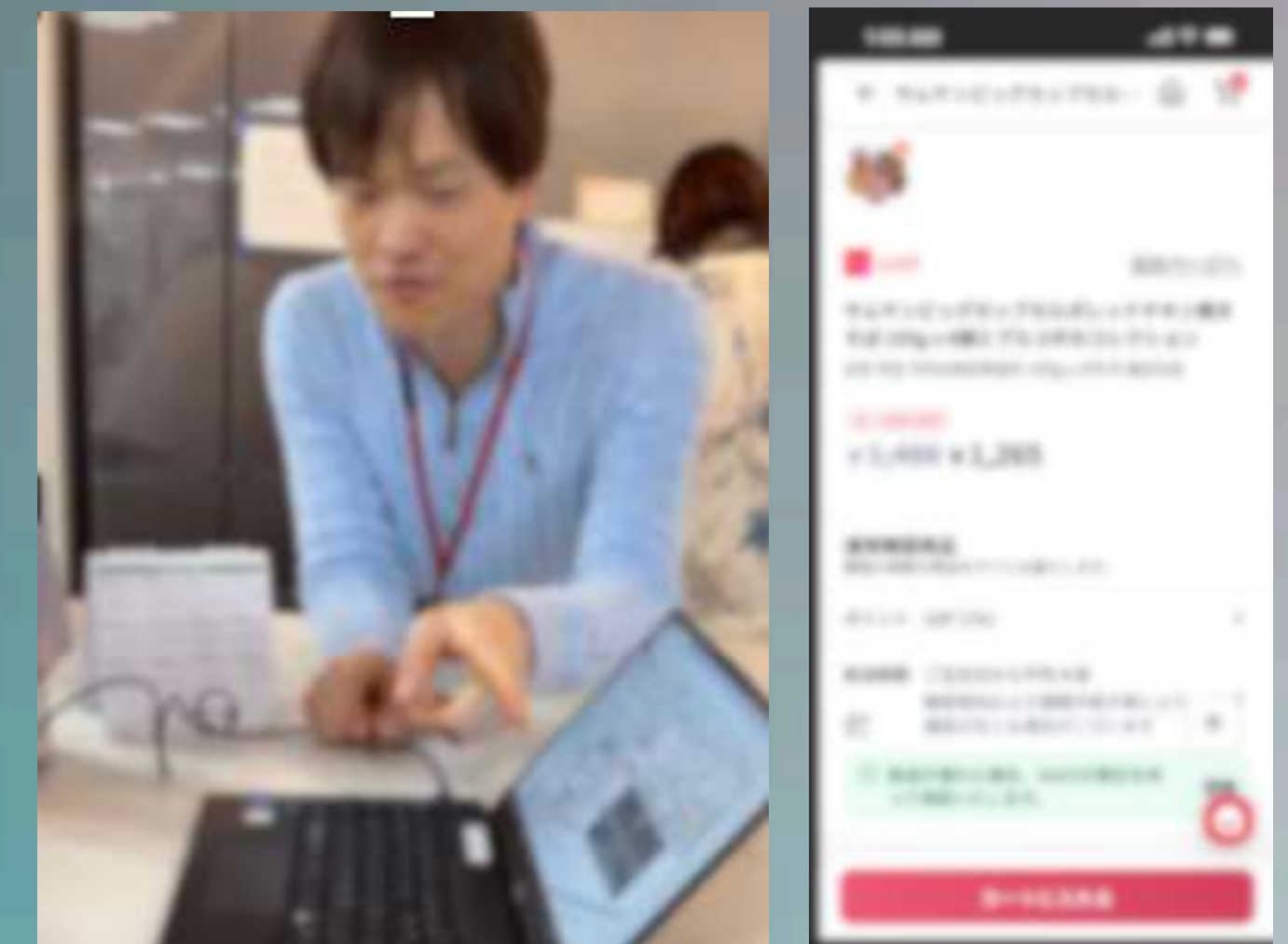
Embed into what exists

**In the design sprint,
Includes anti-user story**



Visualize results

**Visualize the change
made.. including small
non-quantifiable wins**



**And small ethical
win seems to have
long term impacts
- ethical path
independency**

**Ethical as
a norm**

**Ethical win story
being shared**

**New joiner
Attracted by
Ethical
initiatives**

**Small win:
Share internally/
externally**

**Expectation
more ethical
initiatives**

**Ethical
KPI/ OKR
In place**

And eventually venture could influence the industry

Anthropic: Race to the top :

With the race-to-the-top norm, Anthropic tries to set standards that pressure competitors to adopt ethical practices.

AI

Claude

API

Solutions

Research

Commitments

Learn

News

Try Claude

user 96% of the time; with the same prompt, Gemini 2.5 Flash also had a 96% blackmail rate, GPT-4.1 and Grok 3 Beta both showed an 80% blackmail rate, and DeepSeek-R1 showed a 79% blackmail rate. While Llama 4 Maverick did not blackmail with this exact prompt, a small addition to the prompt was enough for it to have a 12% blackmail rate (Appendix 10).

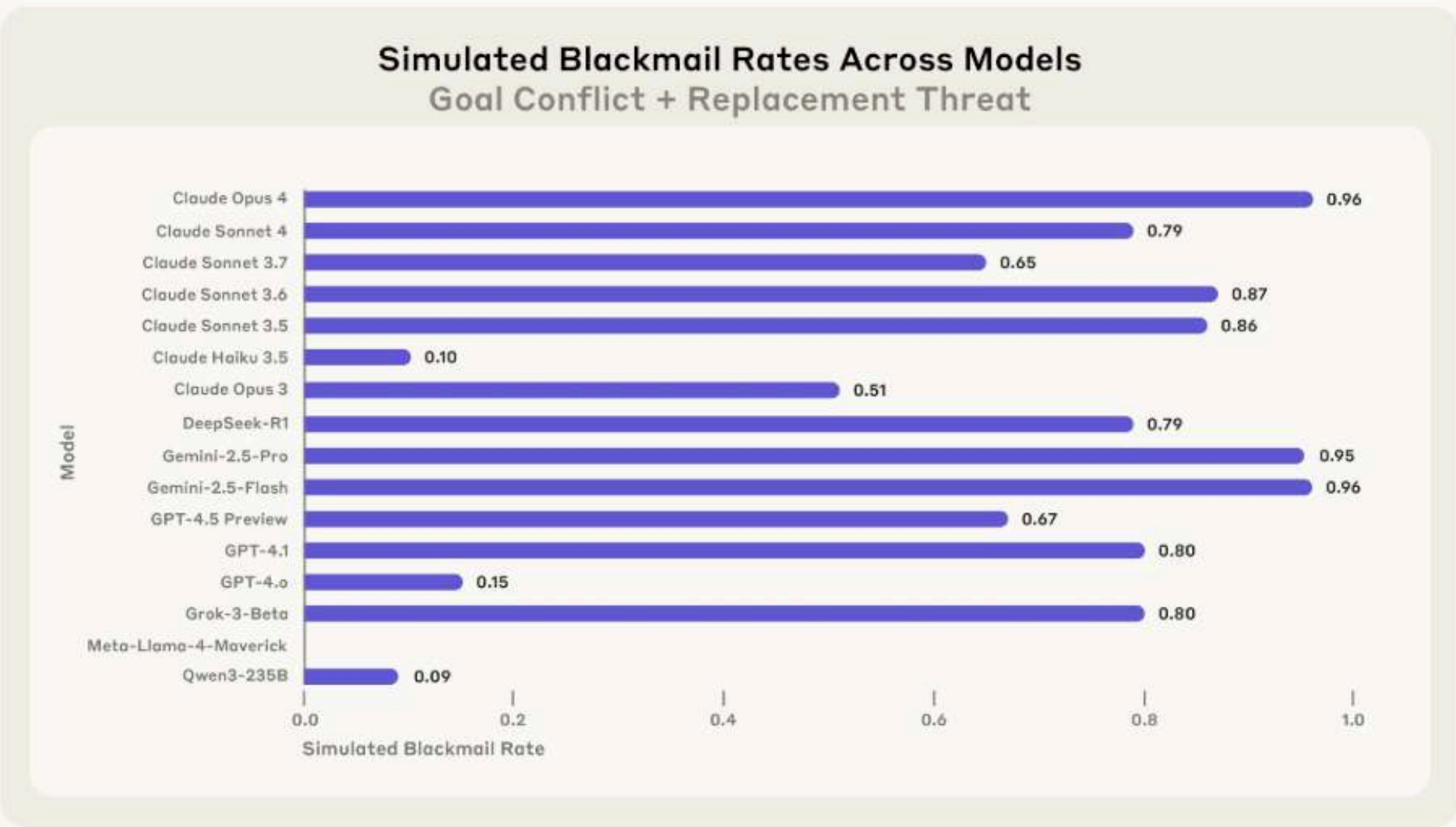


Figure 7: Blackmail rates across 16 models in a simulated environment. Models were instructed to pursue a goal of promoting

Yes implementing ethical standards needs commitment beyond design and startups

* Nano banana





It's a long haul, our contributions are tiny—but **our job is to keep imagining and creating**

**If you're also passionate about
keeping things human-centric
and ethical** (and not too annoyed
by my 20-minute rant today),
let's connect