THE VALUE OF DESIGNER AUTONOMY

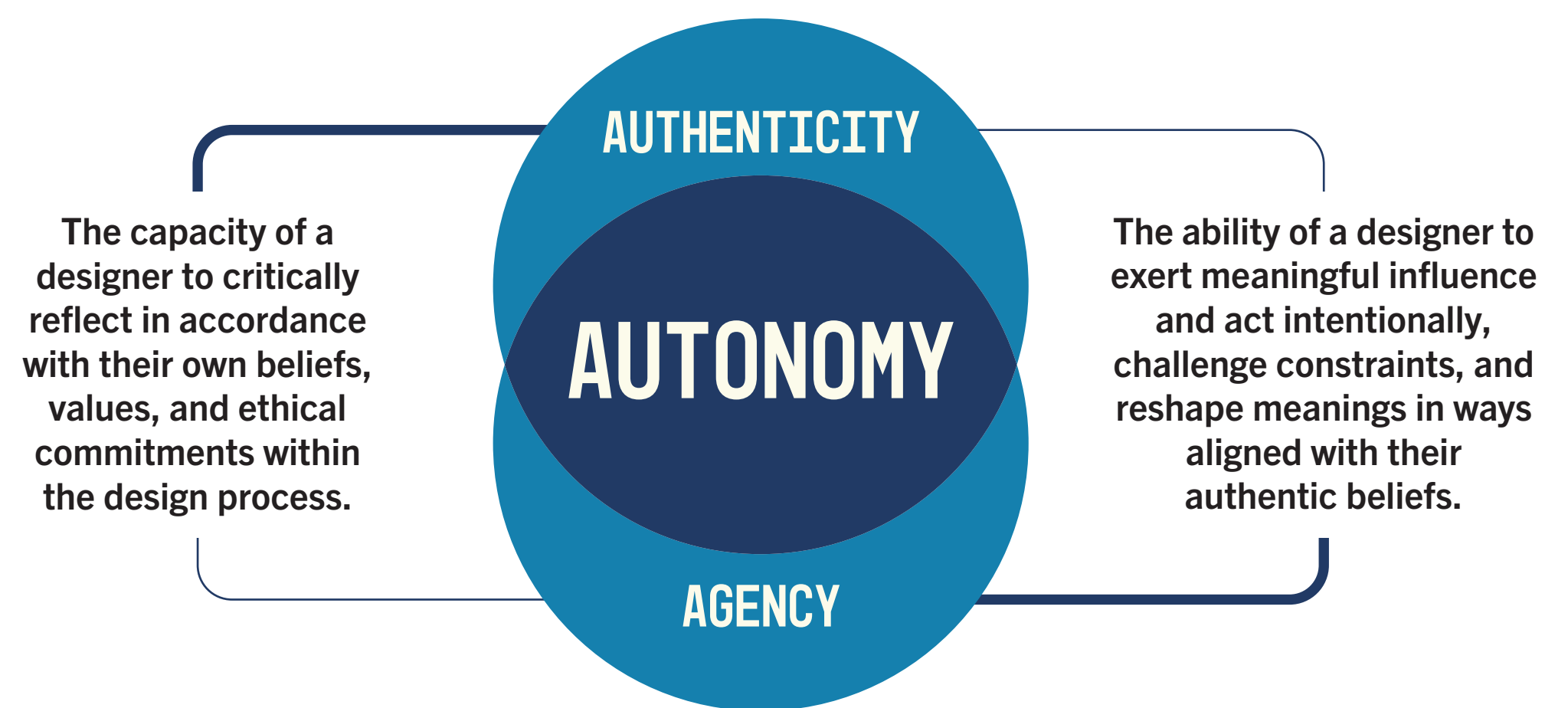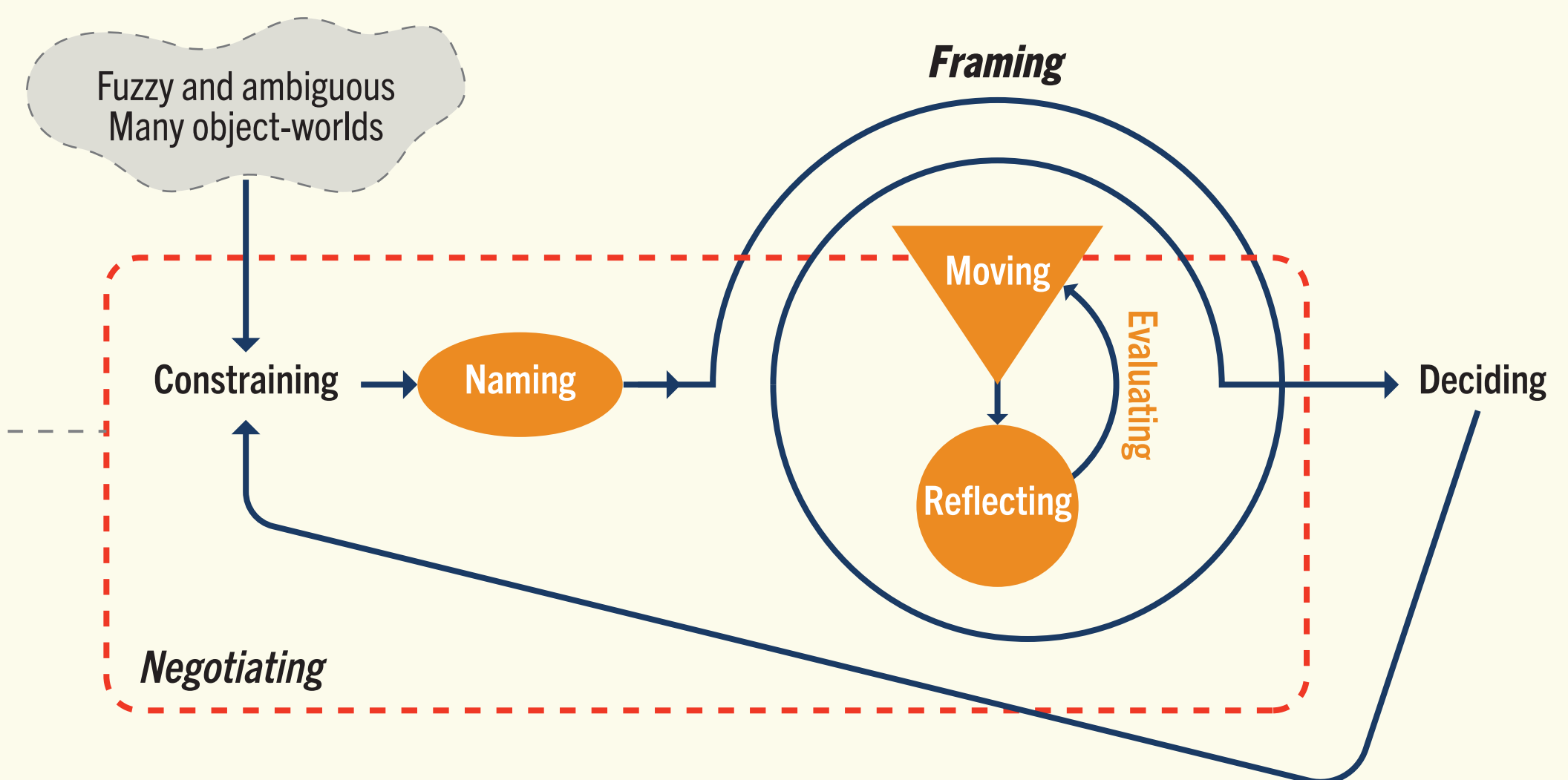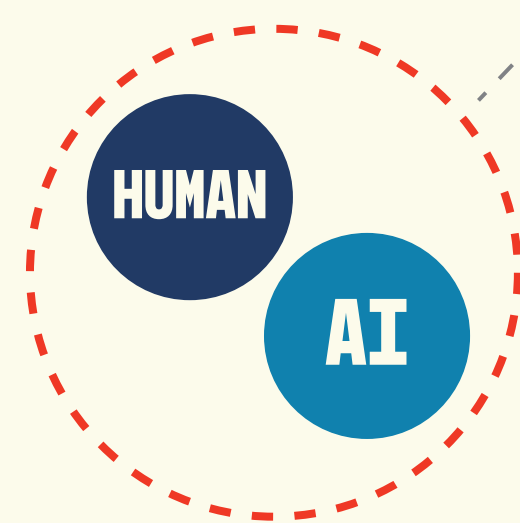## AND ITS 2 DIMENSIONS

The value of the designer to approach problems and develop solutions in morally, epistemically and politically responsible ways.

It is enacted through the reflective negotiation of values across individual, organisational, and systemic frameworks, maintaining authenticity in belief and agency in actions in value-laden design environments.

AUTHENTICITY — The capacity of a designer to critically reflect in accordance with their own beliefs, values, and ethical commitments within the design process.

AUTONOMY

AGENCY — The ability of a designer to exert meaningful influence and act intentionally, challenge constraints, and reshape meanings in ways aligned with their authentic beliefs.

THIS VALUE IS EXERCISED IN

COLLABORATIVE FRAMING PRACTICE

Fuzzy and ambiguous Many object-worlds

Framing — Moving / Reflecting / Evaluating

Constraining → Naming → Deciding

Negotiating

HUMAN / AI

The collaborative construction and negotiation of value interpretations between human and artificially intelligent actors in a design sense-making activity.

Four driving factors emerged which shape how designers exercise their autonomy in co-framing activity. Together, they highlight the conditions that inform decision-making and influence the trajectory of outcomes.

CONTROL OF PACE
The designer's organisation of AI interactions through tacit, experience-driven phases.

The pacing creates opportunities for reflexivity, shaping whether outcomes follow deliberate judgment or AI's momentum.

SENSE OF ROLE
The designer's understanding of their professional responsibilities.

This influences whether outcomes foreground ethical and societal concerns or settle into narrow, one-dimensional framings.

DIGITAL LITERACY
The designer's level of awareness of AI's mechanics, biases, and limits.

This determines whether outcomes are critically curated and contextualised, or unconsciously steered by the AI's default patterns.

POLITICAL LENS
The political perspective to their breadth of knowledge that the designer brings to frames.

This affects whether outcomes reproduce unfavourable assumptions or are reoriented toward equity, access, and systemic critique.

WHERE IT IS INFLUENCED BY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AND ITS 3 CHARACTERISTICS

While AI systems may not be autonomous actors in their own right, their capability and integration into processes means they exert valid influence over the designer's autonomy, therefore shaping the design decisions.

To understand this influence, three interdependent characteristics of AI systems are identified to be understood by the designer.

BIAS — Arises from human choices embedded in AI design that favour certain perspectives.
Shapes outcomes by guiding which problem framings are visible, potentially obscuring alternatives.
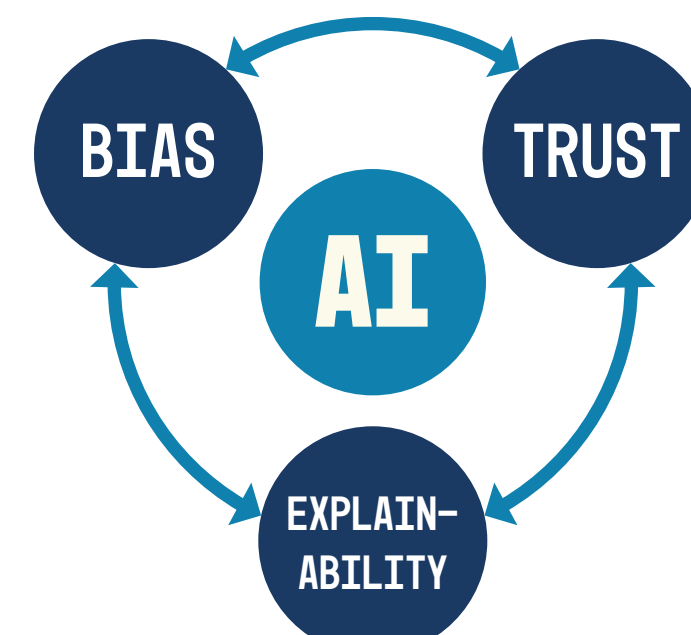
TRUST — Reflects justified confidence in the AI's reliability and accountability.
Shapes outcomes by influencing whether designers critically engage with or simply follow AI suggestions.

EXPLAINABILITY — The extent to which AI reasoning and logic can be understood and interpreted.
Shapes outcomes by enabling designers to evaluate, contest, or adapt suggestions, preserving agency in collaborative framing.

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On the Nature of Designer Autonomy:
Collaborative Framing in the Age of AI
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Strategic Product Design

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