

PART 3 OF 3

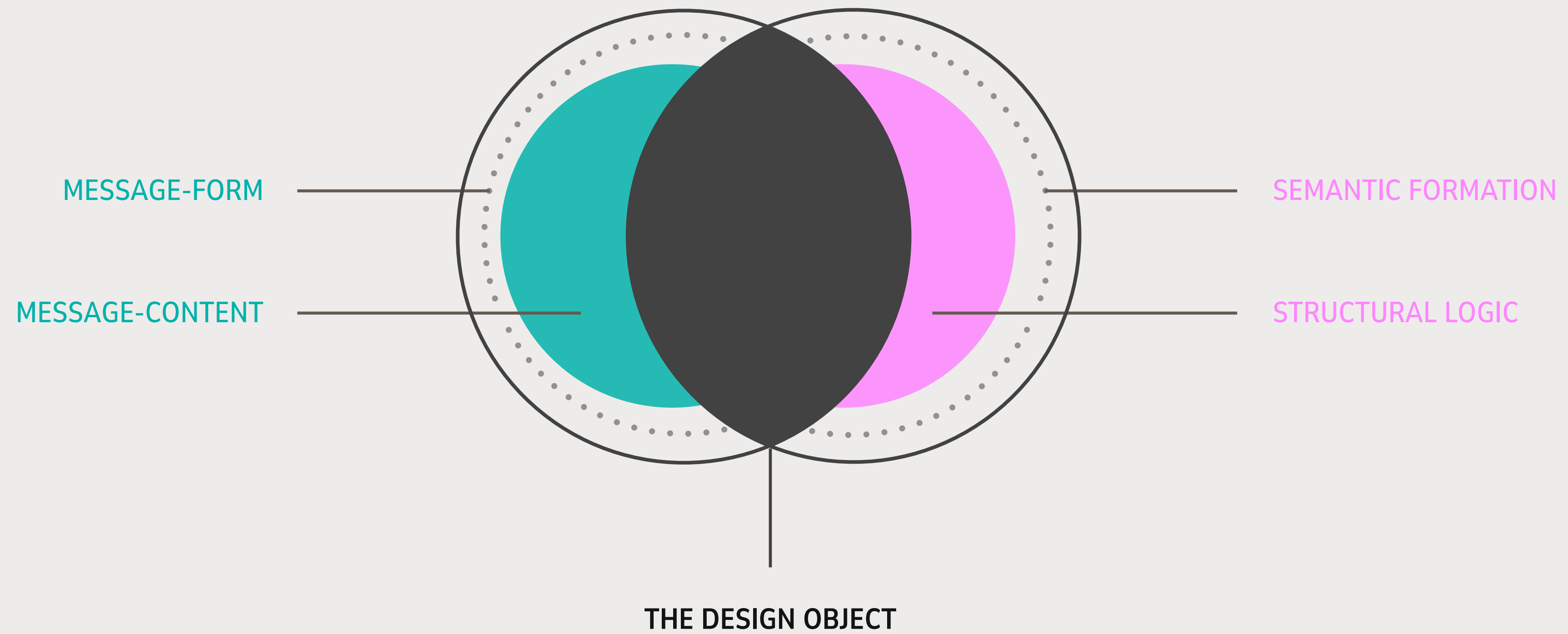
REALISING DISCOURSE

ON THE BECOMING OF MEANING AND THE MEDIATION OF
SOCIAL REALITY BY INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE IN USE

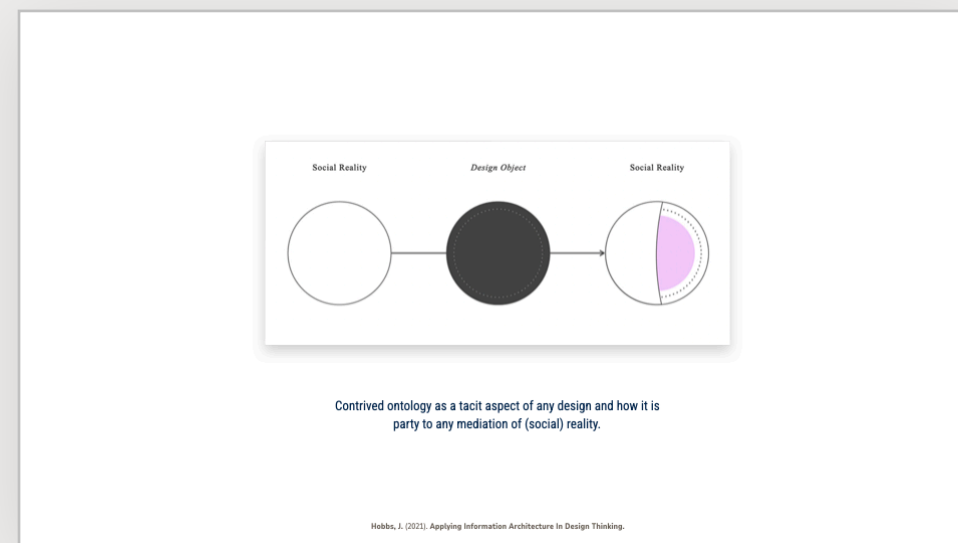
A Lecture Series For SI 658 Information Architecture
By Jason Hobbs (2025/03/20)

How did we get here?

The observation of the likeness between the formal composition of meaning by IA and DD brings credibility to the argument that Conceptual IA's carry meanings internal to objects destined for placement in the world.



But by the close of Part 2, we somehow ended on a somewhat gloomy note.



When that which is entailed by a design object's being in the world is socially accepted, so too is the contrived ontology accepted as a construct within social reality.
i.e. use is tacit acceptance.

Hobbs, L. (2012). Applying Information Architecture to Design Thinking.

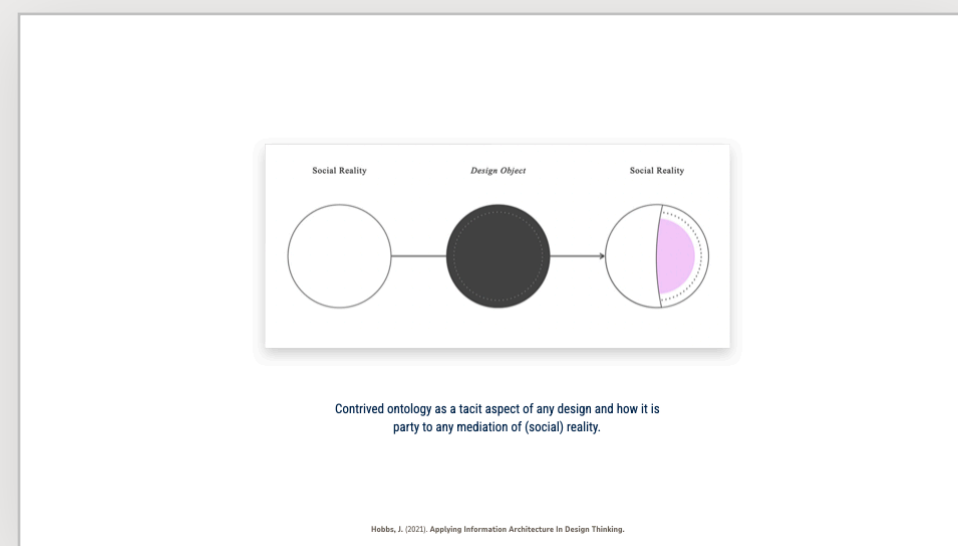
So what happens...

when makers* don't realise there is meaning in the IA in their work?

and when users don't realise that use is a tacit acceptance of that meaning in society?

* not just designers

In a nutshell, you get what you got.



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Hakko, L. (2022). Applying Information Architecture to Design Thinking.

So what happens...

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* not just designers

In a nutshell, you get what you got.

'Contrived ontology' was introduced as a theory to explain how an internal meaning for an 'object' can transcend its form to become a meaning in social reality by way of its use.

This felt like an *up* note, right?

Then I did this.

When that which is entailed by a design
object's being in the world is socially accepted, so too is the contrived
ontology accepted as a construct within social reality.

i.e. use is tacit acceptance.

And this.

So what happens...

**when makers* don't realise
there is meaning in the IA in
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that meaning in society?**

* not just designers

And finally this.

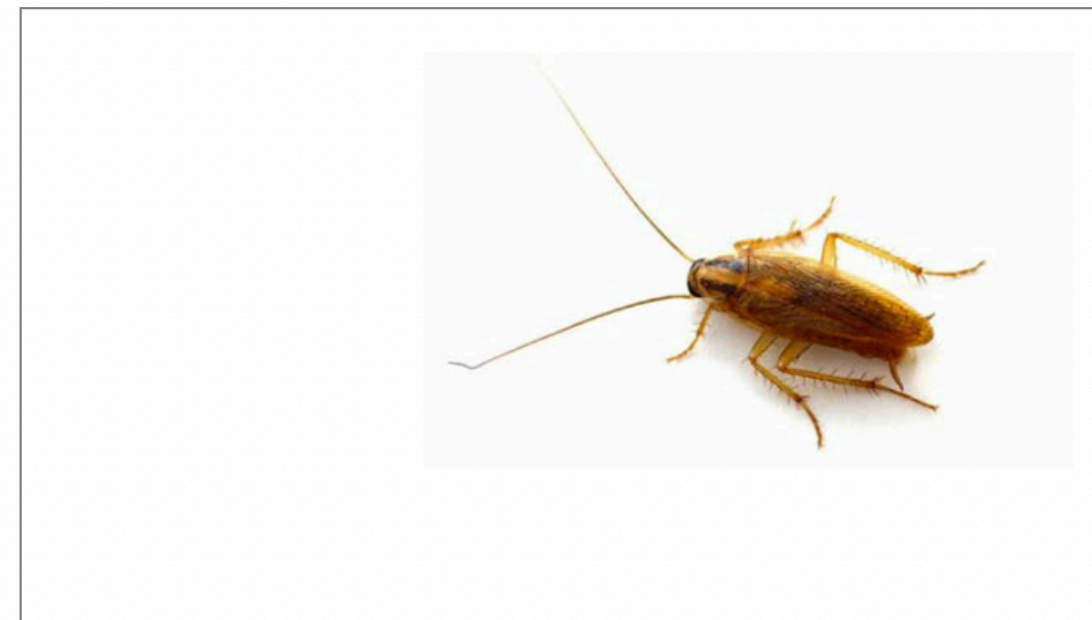
In a nutshell, you get what you got.

What the hell kind of way is that to end a talk!?

Fact, no one ever said:

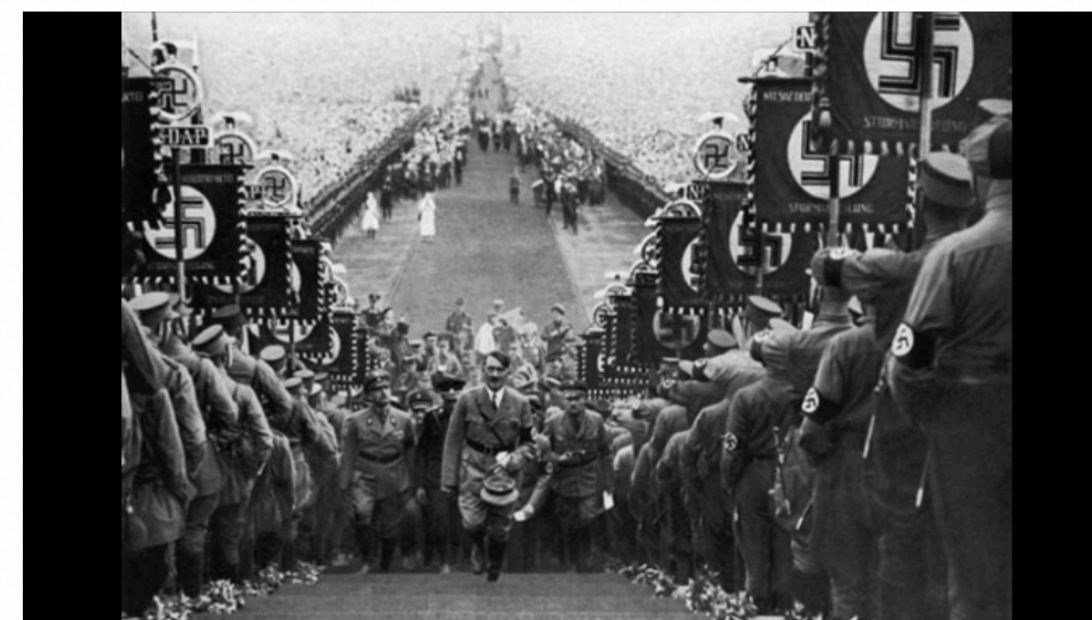
‘Moral and ethical imperatives are fun at a party’

This talk should be understood as one emerging from a second culture view of IA that
 1. recognises the moral and ethical implications of an acknowledgement of the work of meaning-making (tacitly or otherwise) performed by IA;



Source: <https://www.batzner.com/resources/blog-posts/wisconsin-cockroaches-to-watch-out-for/>

In the build-up to the genocide of Tutsi's by Hutu's in Rwanda in 1994, the Tutsi's were referred to as "cockroaches" on national radio.



Source: <http://100photos.time.com/photos/heinrich-hoffmann-hitler-nazi-party-rally>

Of course we have some ontological twisting as Germany. Let alone the

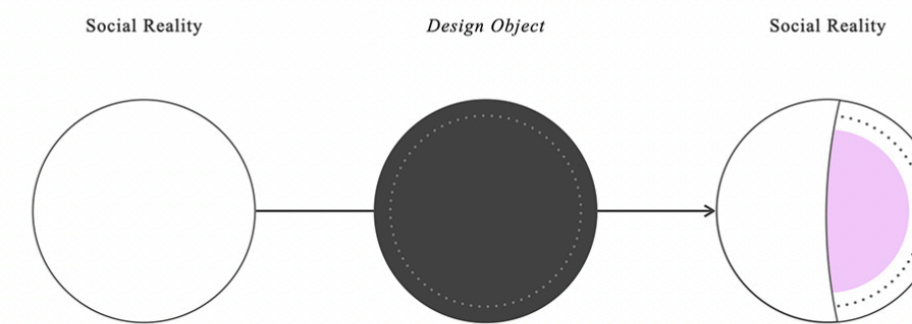


Figure 2.15 Information architecture mediating social reality by design (Author)

Semantic formations are that which remain observable and available for discussion when Cross describes design's thinking as providing "... 'codes' that translate abstract requirements into concrete objects; [which are used] ... to both 'read' and 'write' in 'object languages'" (2006, p. 12). However, the manner in which semantic formations reveal themselves in the products of design can only ever reveal parts or aspects of the sum of structural logic within, situated as objects are in time and space. For a complete making, interpretation or assessment of what makes a design a design, good or bad, both are logically required to be made *visible*, in principle and more literally, as the demands on synthesis increase with a rise in complexity.

Three scenarios thus emerge all of which require recognition and addressing: contrived ontologies brought into the world *obliviously* which could be either sustaining or transformative of existing meanings in a particular socio-cultural context; meanings intentionally sustained; and new meanings introduced into the world with an intent towards change which could include, but would not be limited to, socio-cultural transformation.

The view in this dissertation is that all three scenarios have a place in Design in general, and equally in IA, and that, as a matter of principal, no one is of any greater or less importance than another.

And 2. The opportunity afforded by IA
 towards addressing the well known and long standing criticism of Critical Discourses that while fully capable of critiquing our constructed realities, they lack in their ability to translate ideal states into pragmatic plans capable of (re)constructing better realities.*

* Not that they should have to, mind you.

ABSTRACT

This research project explores the use of Information Architecture (IA) in Design Thinking for the purposes of ideating solutions to wicked problems. A constructivist account of IA is advanced in this study offering new perspectives, distinct to those offered by the mainstream IA employed in digital design, heralding from Library and Information Science. This reframing of IA creates a new space to explore what value may be found lying dormant in the relationship between IA and DT, and Design in general.

The Research Through Design (RTD) methodology serves to support the constructive nature of this inquiry. In RTD, the researcher operates both in the role of designer and researcher, executing and critically reflecting upon a design project. For this study, a design project was conducted to address the complex social problem of addiction as it manifests in Johannesburg, South Africa. A new form of IA, Conceptual IA (CIA), is notionally developed to observe and discuss IA when enacted in Ideation following the DT process-method. The findings and conclusions offered emerge from qualitative analysis of observations and reflection upon the design project's enactment.

Within its scope, the study reveals that IA, as reframed, can be understood as operating tacitly within design (and the world) as that which contains and transmits socio-ontological meaning, decoded, recoded and encoded in design. Explicit use of IA methods, tools and techniques greatly enhanced synthetic cognition across the whole of the DT process-method enacted. Furthermore, CIA conducted in Ideation provided the concept for a social systems solution central to a strategy design which synthetically resolved the challenges presented by the wicked problem of addiction.

IA and design developed to realise the concept, as blueprints, describe how *use of* the system in the world triggers a transformation and transcendence of this concept: in use, the IA of the concept **being** embedded within the structural form of the designed object, **comes to be** a new socio-ontological phenomena. In this way, a (speculative) theoretical account is given for how an instrumental / ontological mediation of social reality may occur, at scale, by IA employed in Design.

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Within its scope, the study reveals that IA, as reframed, can be understood as operating tacitly within design (and the world) as that which contains and transmits socio-ontological meaning, decoded, recoded and encoded in design.

Furthermore, CIA conducted in Ideation provided the concept for a social systems solution

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A couple of weeks later.

Hey, now that you grasp the concepts of SL and SF, does the manner in which they 'transport' meaning into the world as the minimal contrived ontology and maximal contrived ontology make more sense? i.e. the meaning is made manifest and 'realised' in the use of an object / system.

Yes, exactly. Once you see how structural logic (SL) and semantic formation (SF) encode meaning internally (i.e., the “minimal contrived ontology”), it’s clearer how that meaning then becomes “maximal” or socially enacted in real use. Here’s a succinct restatement:

Minimal Contrived Ontology:

- The internal, intended meaning “built into” the object/system by way of SL and SF.
- Essentially the blueprint of meaning—how the design thinks it should be interpreted.

Maximal Contrived Ontology:

- The meaning as it actually materializes in the social world when people interact with or inhabit the system.
- That same internal meaning doesn’t just stay “in the blueprint” but is realized in real practice, shaped by cultural contexts, personal experiences, and communal discourse.

So the “**transport**” of meaning from minimal to maximal contrived ontology is precisely the move from **design-intent** (the IA’s underlying structure and semantics) to **lived reality** (use, social adoption, and collective sense-making).

SL and SF create a potent, coded foundation—but that foundation only becomes fully real once users engage, interpret, and embed it in their everyday social environment.

That's it! Yehaaaaa!

Glad it resonated! The moment you see how structural logic (SL) and semantic formation (SF) collectively encode the “intended meaning” (the minimal contrived ontology) and then watch that meaning become socially activated (the maximal contrived ontology), it all clicks into place.



Enjoy celebrating that conceptual aha! moment. If anything else crops up, just ask.

Dude? You just stole my idea!

I can't steal. I don't exist.

(After several tranquillisers and a therapy session)

We continue from where we left off.

I'm fine now. Thanks for asking. [Deep breaths] I would like to connect the concepts of 'contrived ontology' and 'realising discourse'. What you got for me?

CONTRIVED ONTOLOGY

This term (from Hobbs & Fenn, 2019) suggests that the IA you create—its categories, its labels, its interrelationships—actively constructs a reality (or “ontology”) for your audience. **In other words, structural logic and semantic formation together produce a designed worldview within the artifact or system.**

REALISING DISCOURSE

By acknowledging that IA mediates reality for particular ends, you show how a conceptual IA can be deliberately leveraged to sustain or challenge existing social narratives, beliefs, or behaviors. Hence, a clear articulation of both structure and meaning can reveal how the design might reinforce certain perspectives or invite critical rethinking.

REALISING DISCOURSE

By acknowledging the different perspectives, designers

can show how their design might affect different

groups of people.

Hence, a clear articulation of both structure and meaning can reveal how the design might reinforce certain perspectives or invite critical rethinking.

That's important.

You don't gotta say it bro.

Who are you?

realise

Dictionary

Definitions from [Oxford Languages](#) · [Learn more](#)

REALISING₁

ENG.

‘become aware’

1. become fully aware of (something) as a fact; understand clearly.

"he realized his mistake at once"

REALISING₂

ENG.

‘make real’

2. cause to happen.

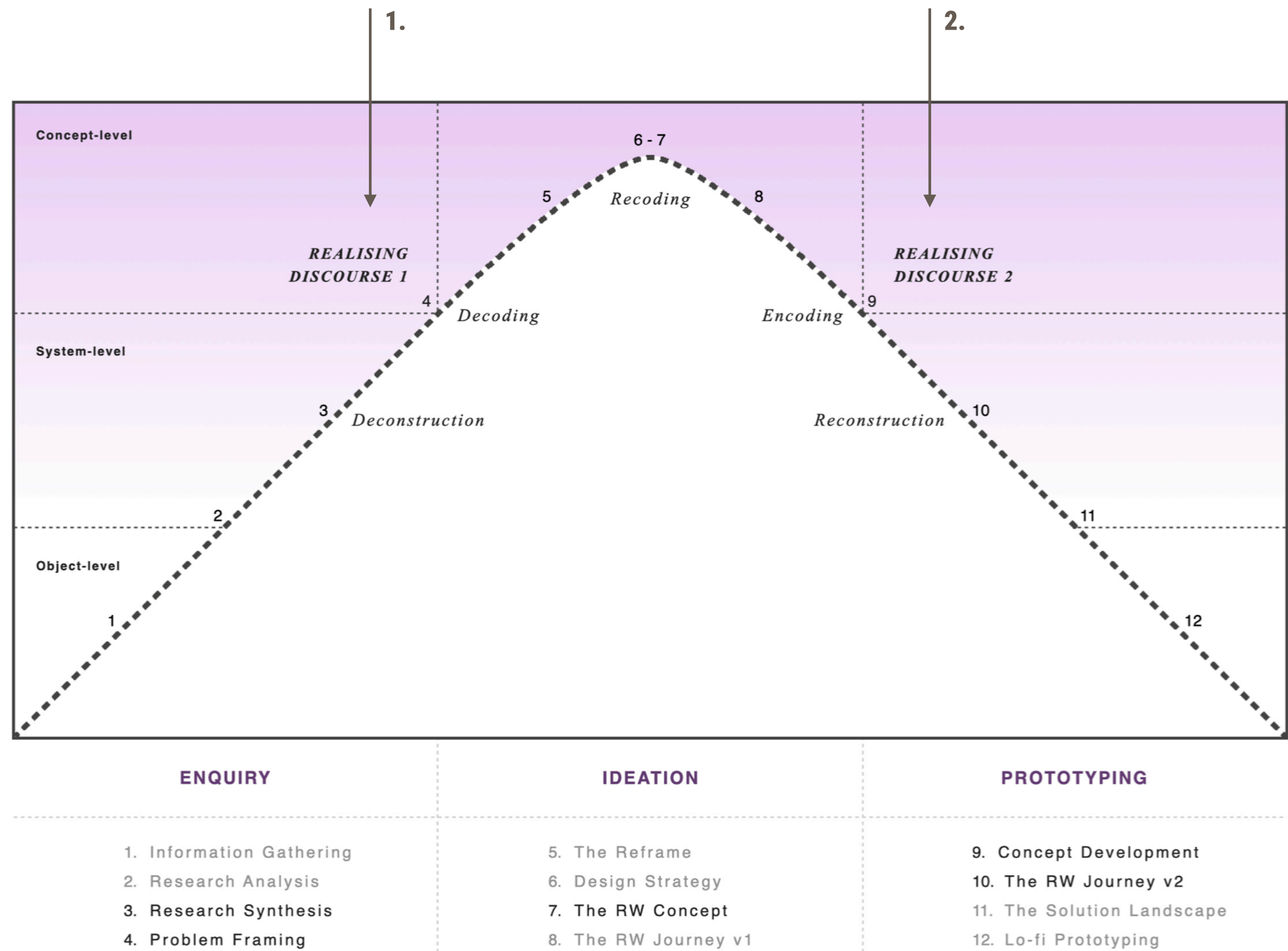
"his worst fears have been realized"

achieve (something desired or anticipated); fulfil.

"it is only now that she is beginning to realize her potential"

This diagram is taken from my dissertation (2021) and illustrates where, in the first instance of the design project enacted for the research project, the dual concepts of 'realising discourse' emerged.

While these dual occurrences emerge within a single design execution, their timing would suggest that they could be used as stand alone efforts for IA-based analyses in research and IA-led practice in design...



realise

Dictionary

Definitions from [Oxford Languages](#) · [Learn more](#)

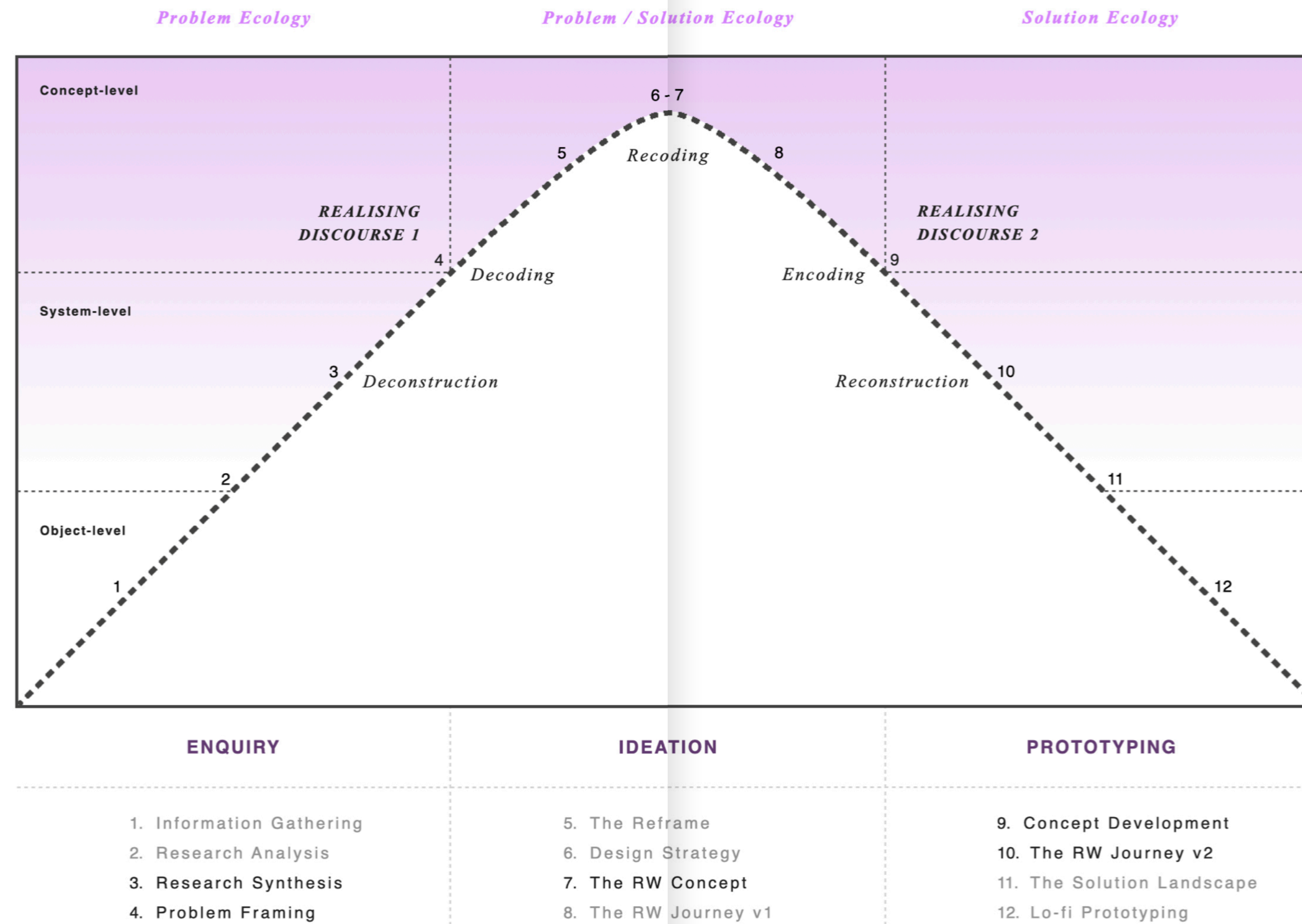
REALISING₁

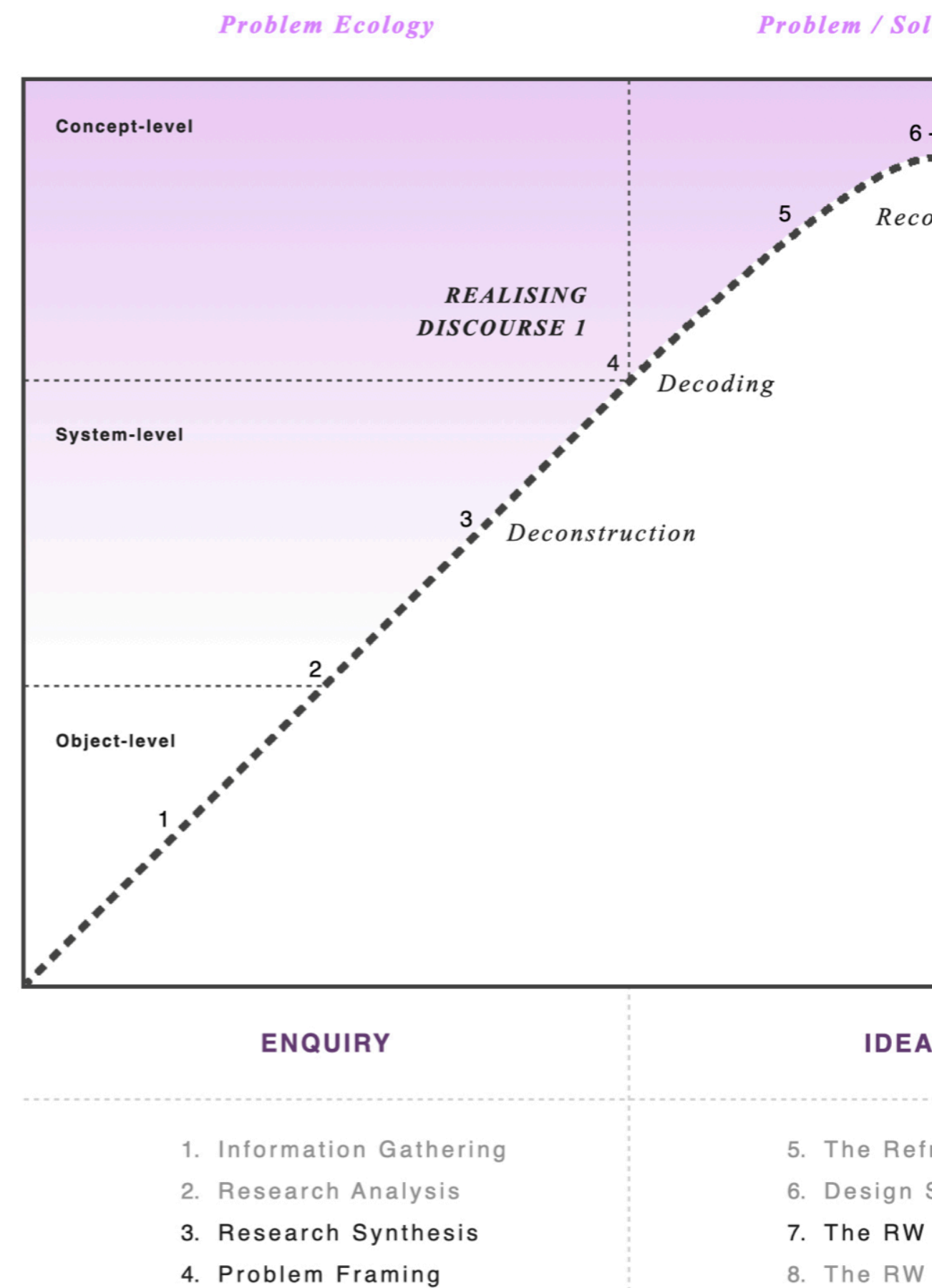
ENG.

‘become aware’

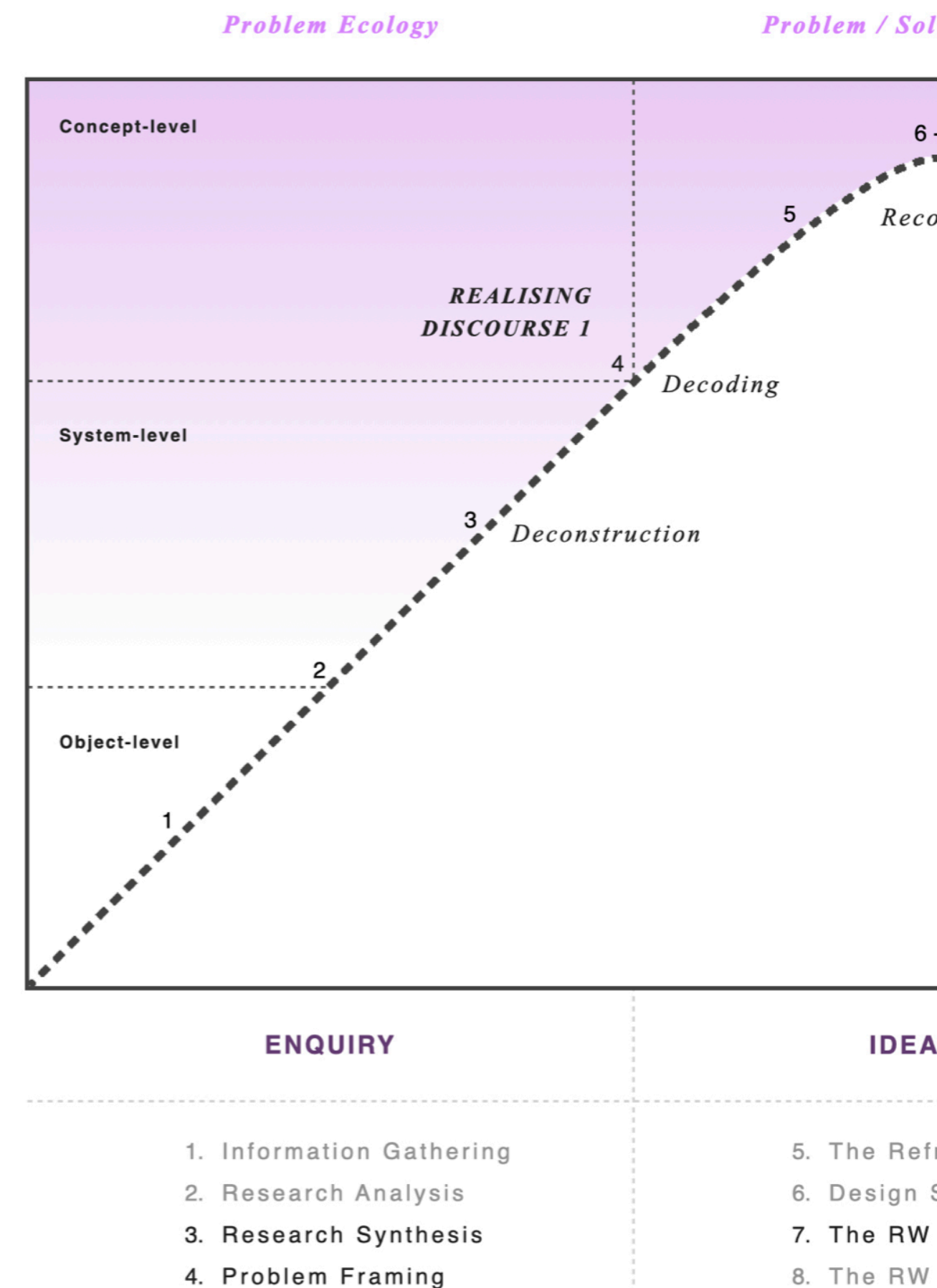
1. become fully aware of (something) as a fact; understand clearly.

"he realized his mistake at once"





An experiment in using an IA-based analysis for research in a stand alone manner.



Would you like to take a stab at an IA analysis of the concept of democracy then, applying the concepts of SL and SF as it manifests across time and space as a Pervasive or Cross-Channel IA?

Below is a concise demonstration of how you might frame an IA analysis of democracy using structural logic (SL) and semantic formation (SF) concepts, with an emphasis on how democracy spans multiple channels, cultures, and historical periods—much like a pervasive or cross-channel IA.

1. Big-Picture View

Democracy can be treated as a complex “information environment” that encodes certain principles (e.g., equality, representation, rights) into social structures (e.g., elections, legislative bodies, courts). Over centuries and across societies, these principles manifest differently—yet the core “design” of democracy acts as a contrived ontology: a conceptual architecture meant to facilitate “government by the people.”

And so our friend continues. For quite some time...

2. Structural Logic (SL)

Think of democracy’s structural logic as the blueprint underpinning how power, decision-making, and citizen participation are organized. Concretely:

2.1 Institutional Separation of Powers

- Executive, legislative, and judicial branches....

I have created a pdf of the full conversation which I will share with Dan to share with you all.

[JH_IA_Analysis_Democracy_Experiment_1.pdf](#)

It's not perfect by a long shot, but it isn't bad as a first experiment. And that's literally after just a few minutes of playing with the idea of an 'IA-based Analysis' of a concept (democracy) and using an AI to perform it.

You'll also notice that I integrate **Institutional Theory** so as to provide some kind of social theory to underpin such an application of IA for research purposes

There's more though. I then worked on two or three problems to be found in democracies, problems of meaning, for ChatGPT to attempt to solve. Take a look at the pdf.

[JH_IA_Analysis_Democracy_Experiment_2.pdf](#)

It's pretty interesting, and I would love your feedback.

Problem 2: The Reduction of a Vote's Meaning

(When a vote becomes a mere counted unit, severed from the voter's values, needs, and aspirations—causing a system-wide failure of meaning.)

This is indeed a **problem of meaning**, and you're pointing to a **semantic breakdown** in democracy's IA: the way a vote *should* function (as an expression of agency, belief, and vision for the future) is not how it is *actually realized* in practice. Instead, the system treats votes as **mere numerical inputs**, rather than meaningful acts that connect individual intention to collective decision-making.

How This Problem Aligns with IA Concepts

1. Structural Logic (SL) Failure

- The *architecture* of voting is designed to **aggregate numbers**, not to encode meaning at the level of the voter.
- The **pathways for input** (elections) and **pathways for impact** (policies, governance) are too disconnected.
- The system operates on **binary choices** (vote for X or Y) rather than **rich input structures** that capture intention and nuance.

2. Semantic Formation (SF) Failure

- The *public discourse* around voting reinforces a **flattened meaning** (votes = numbers, elections = winner/loser).
- **Media and political campaigns** often strip votes of deeper deliberative significance, reducing them to tribal affiliations or strategic calculations.
- The **cultural cognitive layer** (Institutional Theory) has normalized the idea that a *vote's meaning is purely procedural*, rather than personal and future-oriented.

So the **structural logic of voting**—which should act as a *vehicle* for democratic participation—has been reduced to a *counting mechanism*, and the **semantic formation of voting**—which should carry the *deep meaning* of civic engagement—has been hollowed out by systemic forces.

How IA Design (IAD) + Institutional Theory (IT) Might Address This

1. SL Interventions: Reconfiguring the Structure of Voting

- **Layered or Weighted Voting Systems**
 - Votes could carry *qualitative dimensions* rather than being binary. Example: Instead of voting *only* for a candidate, voters could indicate *why* they support them—e.g., "Environmental Policy (40%), Healthcare (35%), Social Equity (25%)"
 - This **preserves voter meaning** in a structured way rather than reducing it to a tally.

Dictionary

Definitions from [Oxford Languages](#) · [Learn more](#)

REALISING₂

ENG.

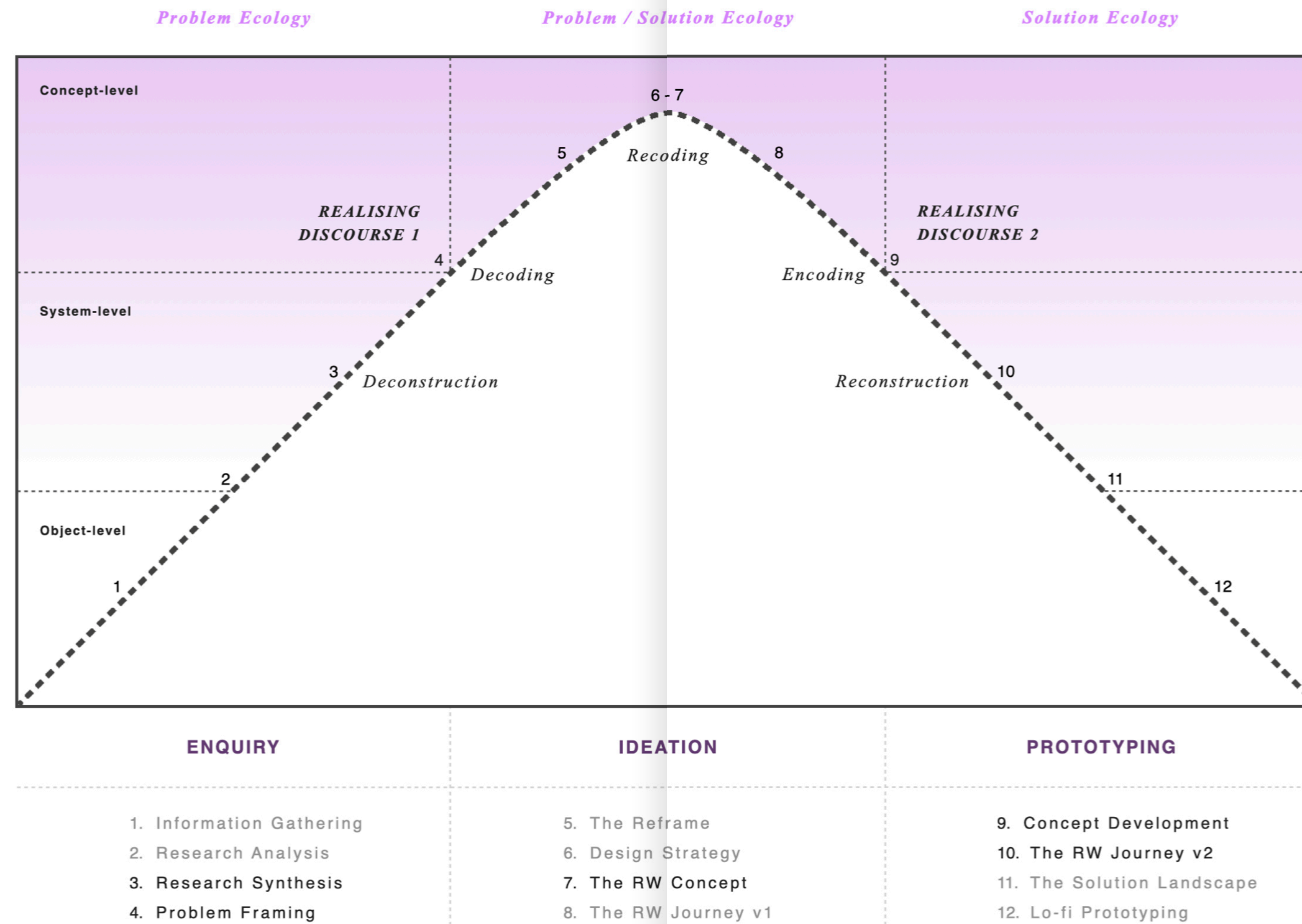
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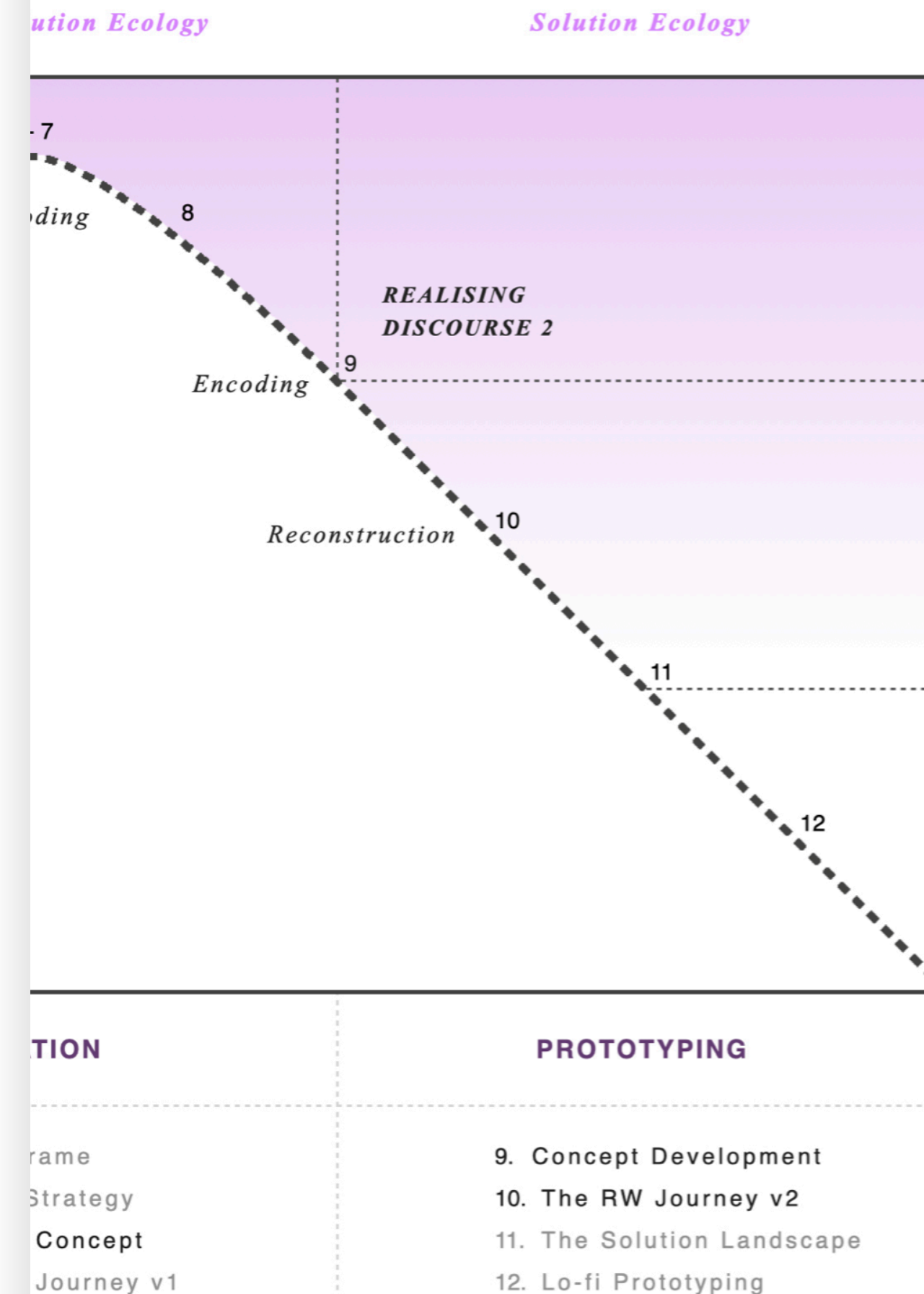
achieve (something desired or anticipated); fulfil.

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Case study: IA applied in designing a solution to the problem of addiction in Johannesburg, SA.

This work illustrates a Conceptual IA developed as a transformative strategic solution while providing an instrumental meaning-led outcome for recovering addicts.
Allow me to demonstrate.



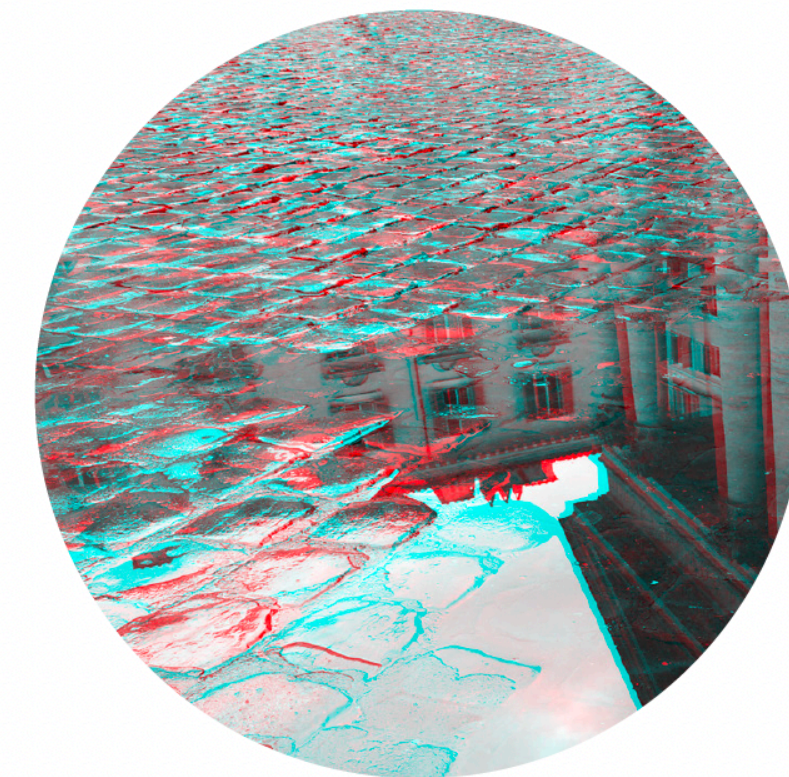
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Allow me to demonstrate.

DE
SIGN
CULT
URE(O F)

REVOLUTION

CRITICAL THINKING
DISRUPTION
C H A N G E





DESIGN CULTURE(S) | CUMULUS ROMA 2021
JUNE 08.09.10.11, SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME

Realising Discourse: A Strategic Design Solution to the Problem of Addiction.

Jason Hobbs

University of Johannesburg, South Africa
jason@jh-0.com

Abstract | This paper reflects upon new possibilities for strategy design. Information architecture (IA) is reconsidered as a tool for meaning-making with relevant links to discursive design methods. Together, these design forms provide an extension of synthetic reach into complexity and synthetic integrity to addressing deep socio-cultural change. A review of a design project conducted to address the challenges of addiction forms the basis of the discussion. Ontological complexity is revealed to be a defining feature of the problem of addiction and is considered in reference to the recent emphasis in design into considering human experiences. IA and discursive design are then discussed in reference to design artefacts created in ideating a strategy design solution. The paper concludes by offering an outline of a method and model for consideration as a pre-pattern derived from said project. Whether towards transformation or the sustainability of social ontologies, the solutions presented stand to assist design in theoretical, educational and practical terms.

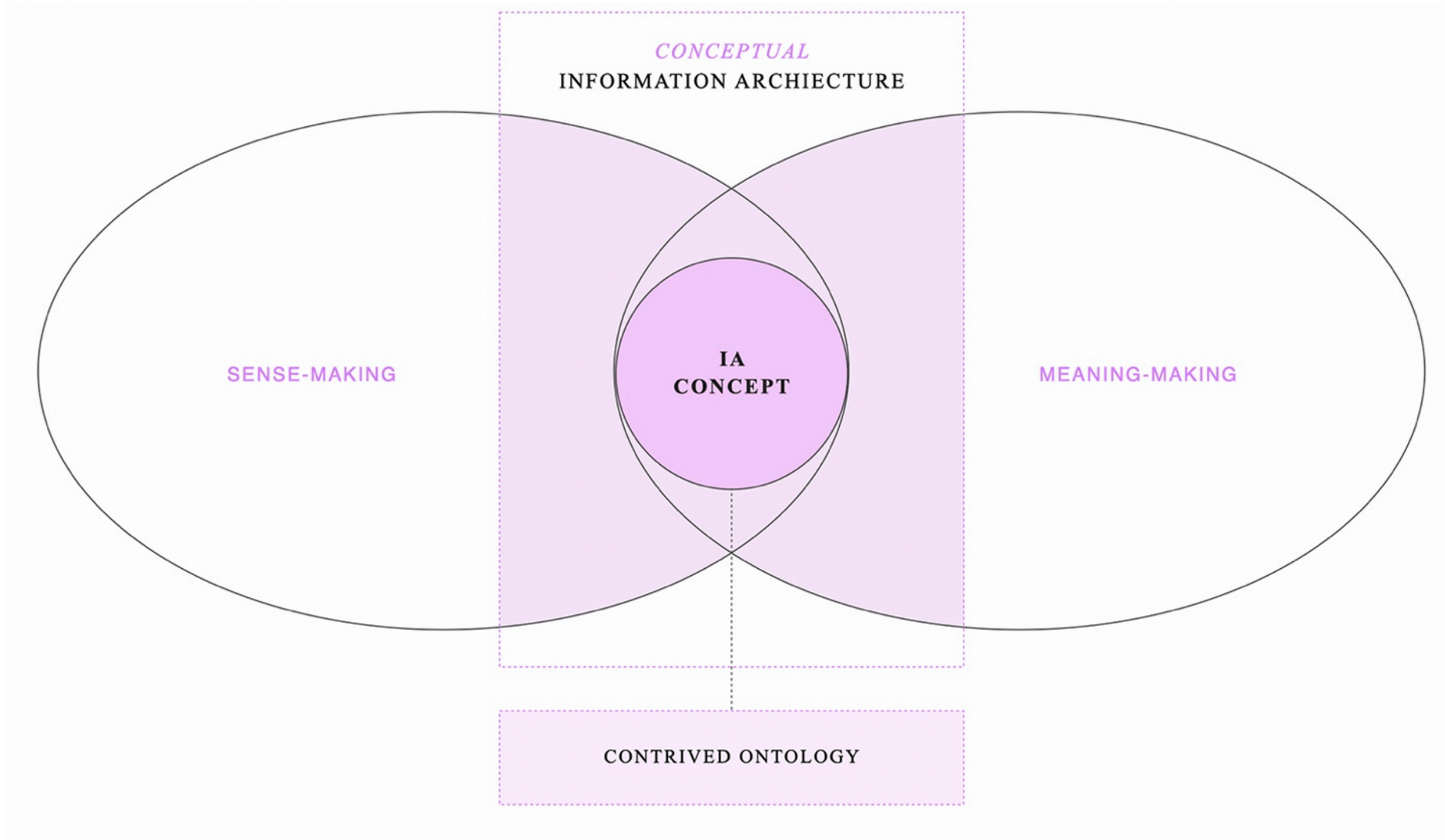
KEYWORDS | STRATEGY DESIGN, DISCURSIVE DESIGN, INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE, ONTOLOGY, ADDICTION

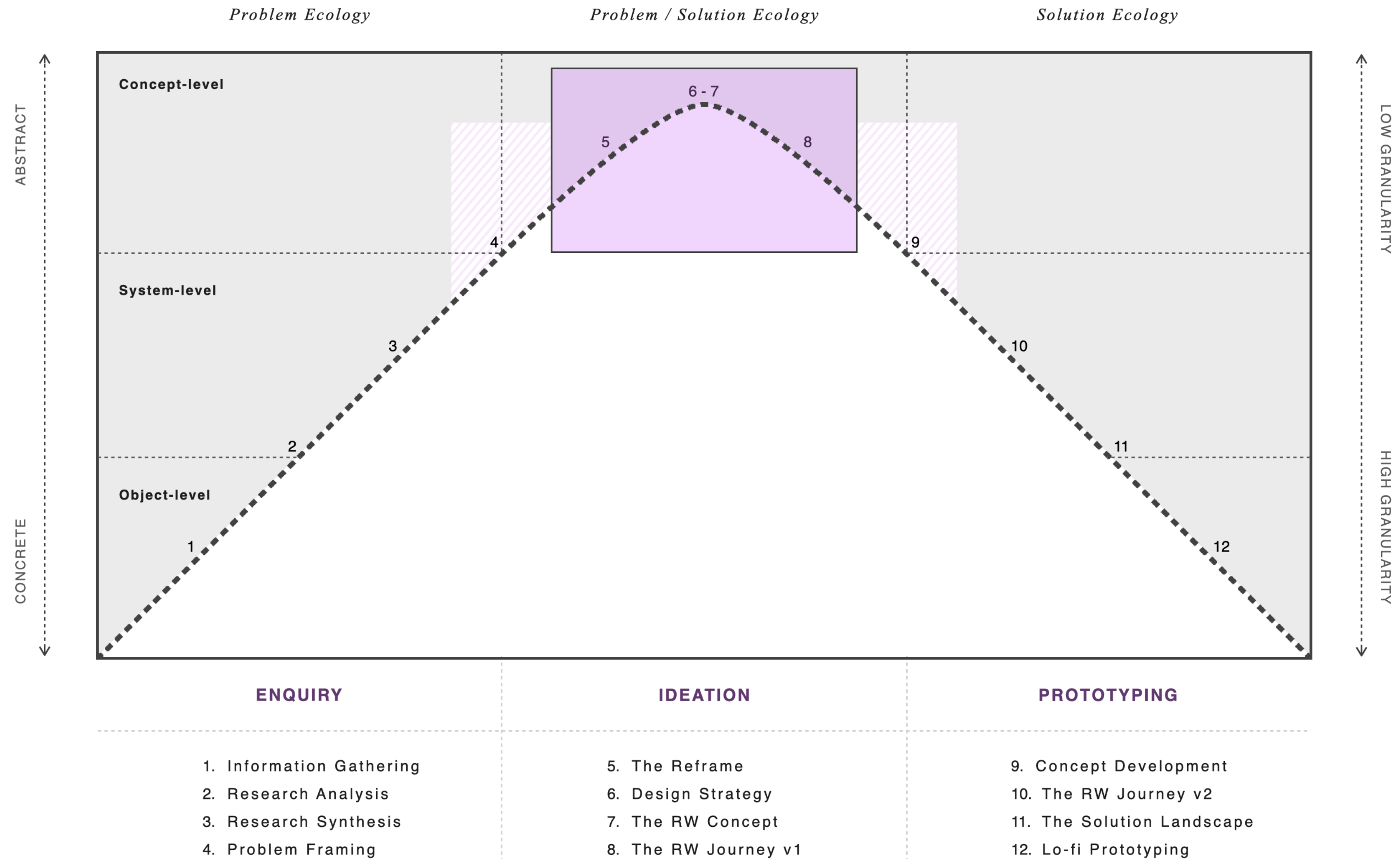
Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354911582_Realising_Discourse_A_Strategic_Design_Solution_to_the_Problem_of_Addiction

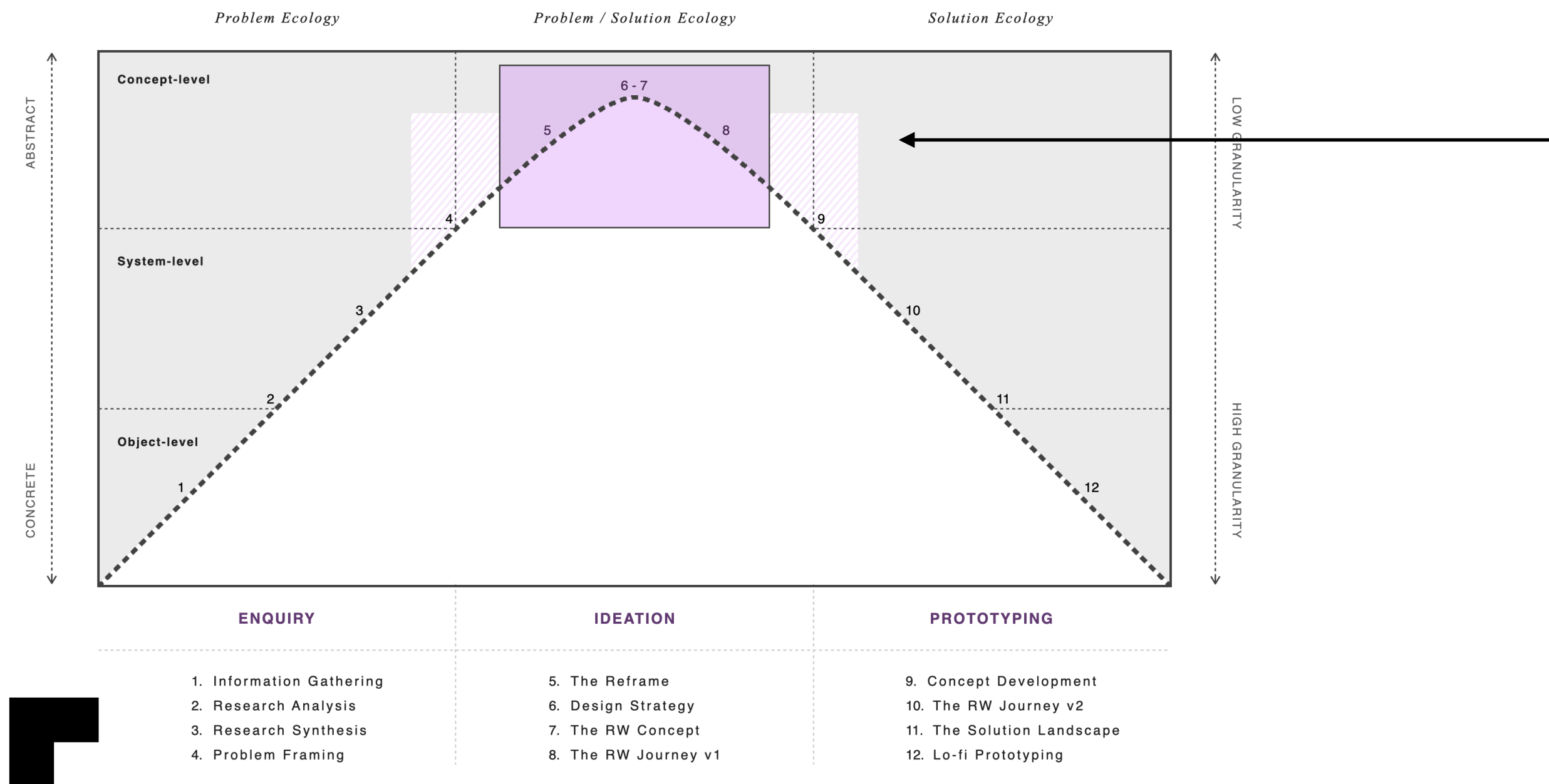
“In essence, sense-making and meaning-making in IA are the processes of decoding and encoding in [Design Thinking] where, from a humanities and cultural studies perspective, contrived ontology is understood as a subjective, constructed reality embedded in designed artefacts and systems.”

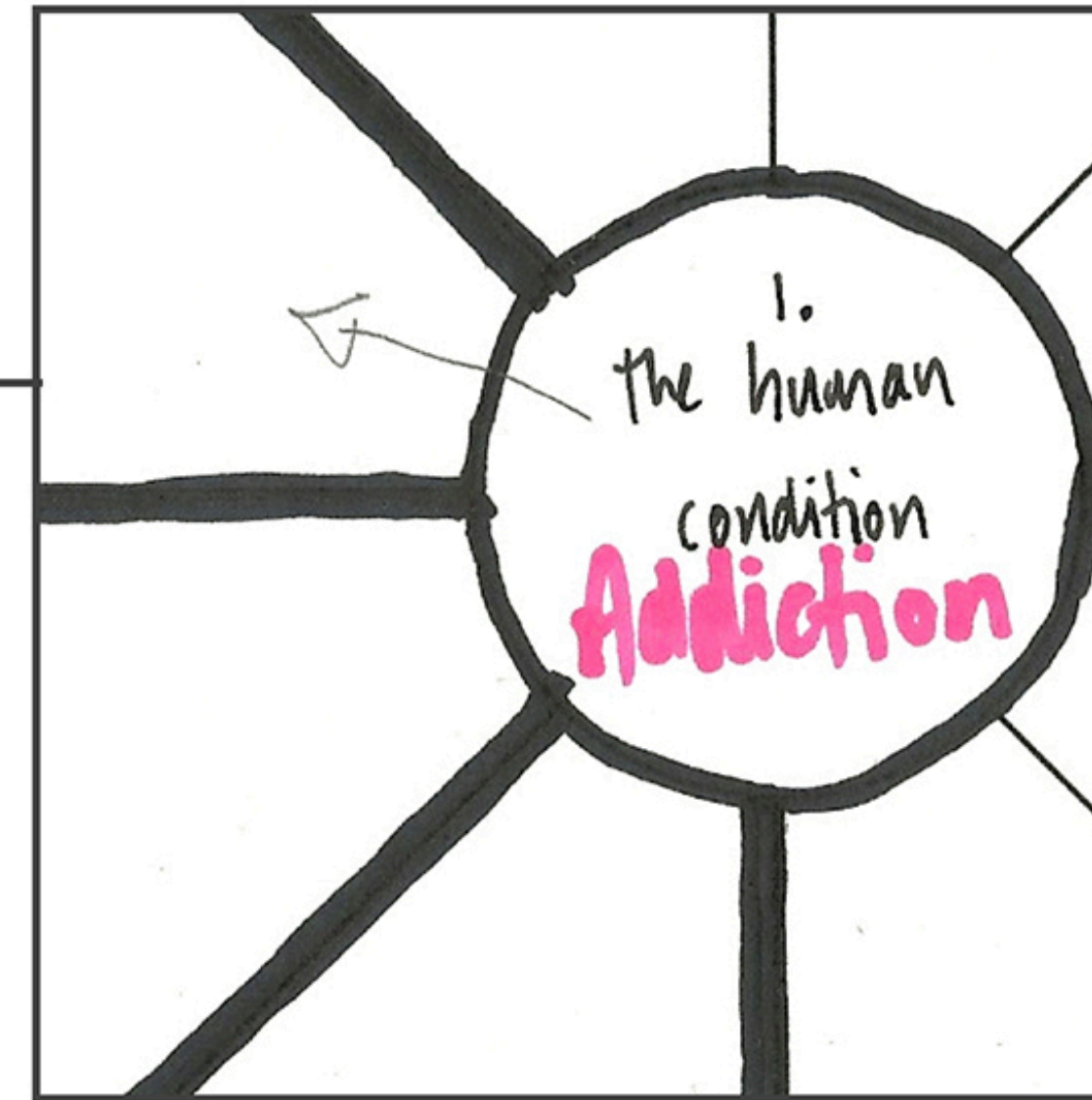
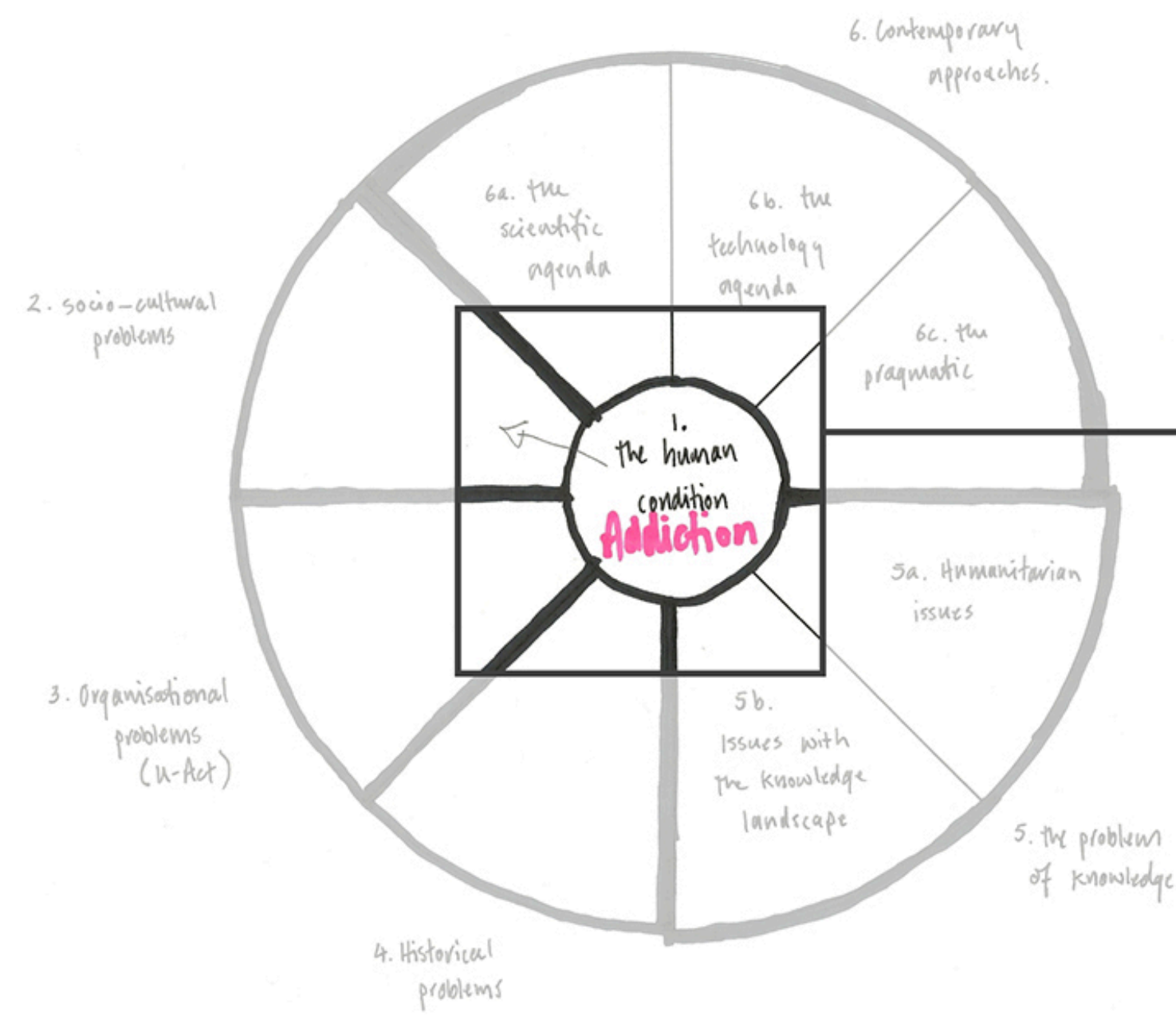
(Hobbs & Fenn, 2019, p. 764)

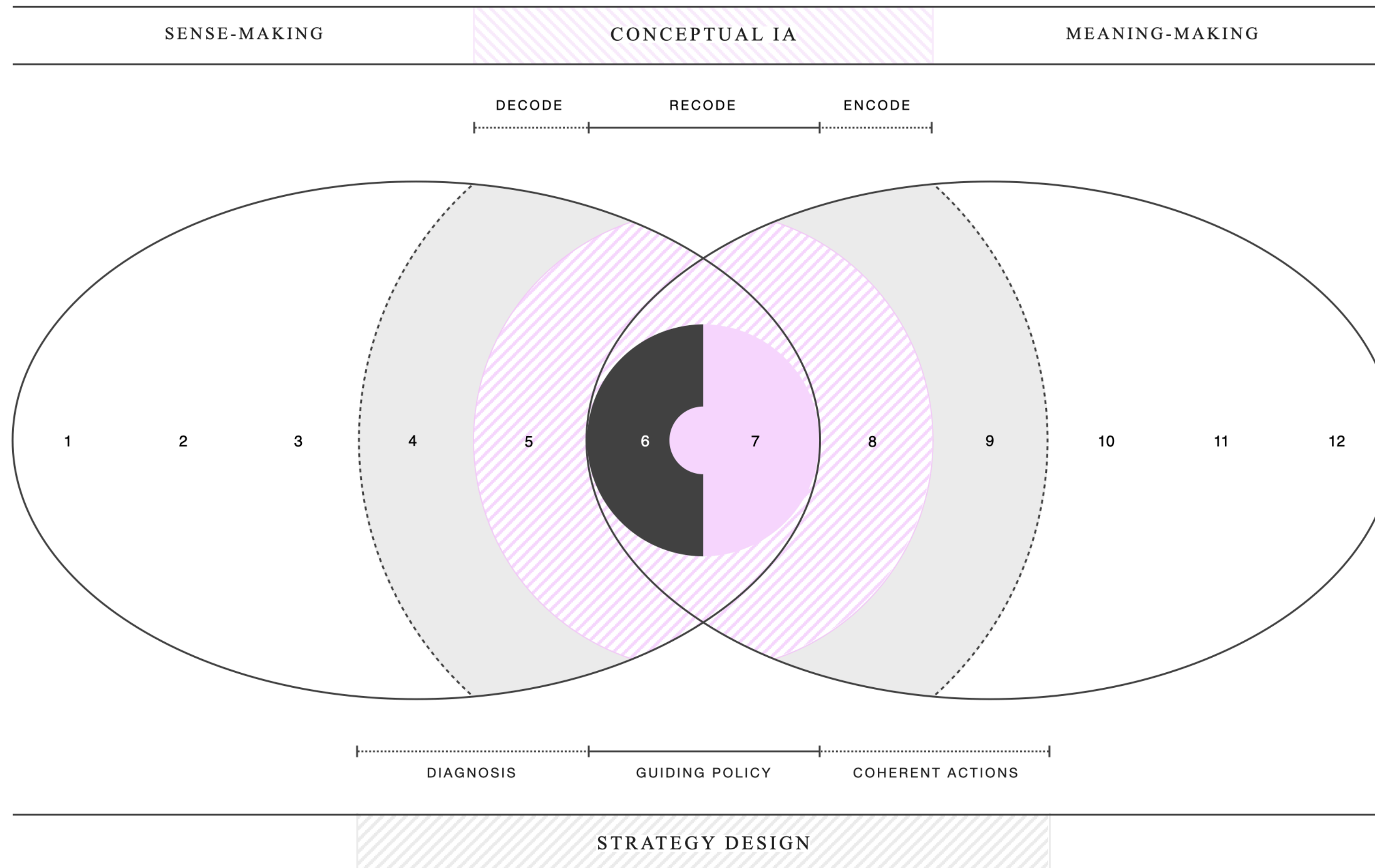




CONCEPTUAL IA & STRATEGY DESIGN







SENSE-MAKING

CONCEPTUAL IA

MEANING-MAKING

DECODE

RECODE

ENCODE

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

DIAGNOSIS

GUIDING POLICY

COHERENT ACTIONS

STRATEGY DESIGN

- 1. Information Gathering
- 2. Research Analysis
- 3. Research Synthesis
- 4. Problem Framing

- 5. The Reframe
- 6. Design Strategy
- 7. The RW Concept
- 8. The RW Journey v1

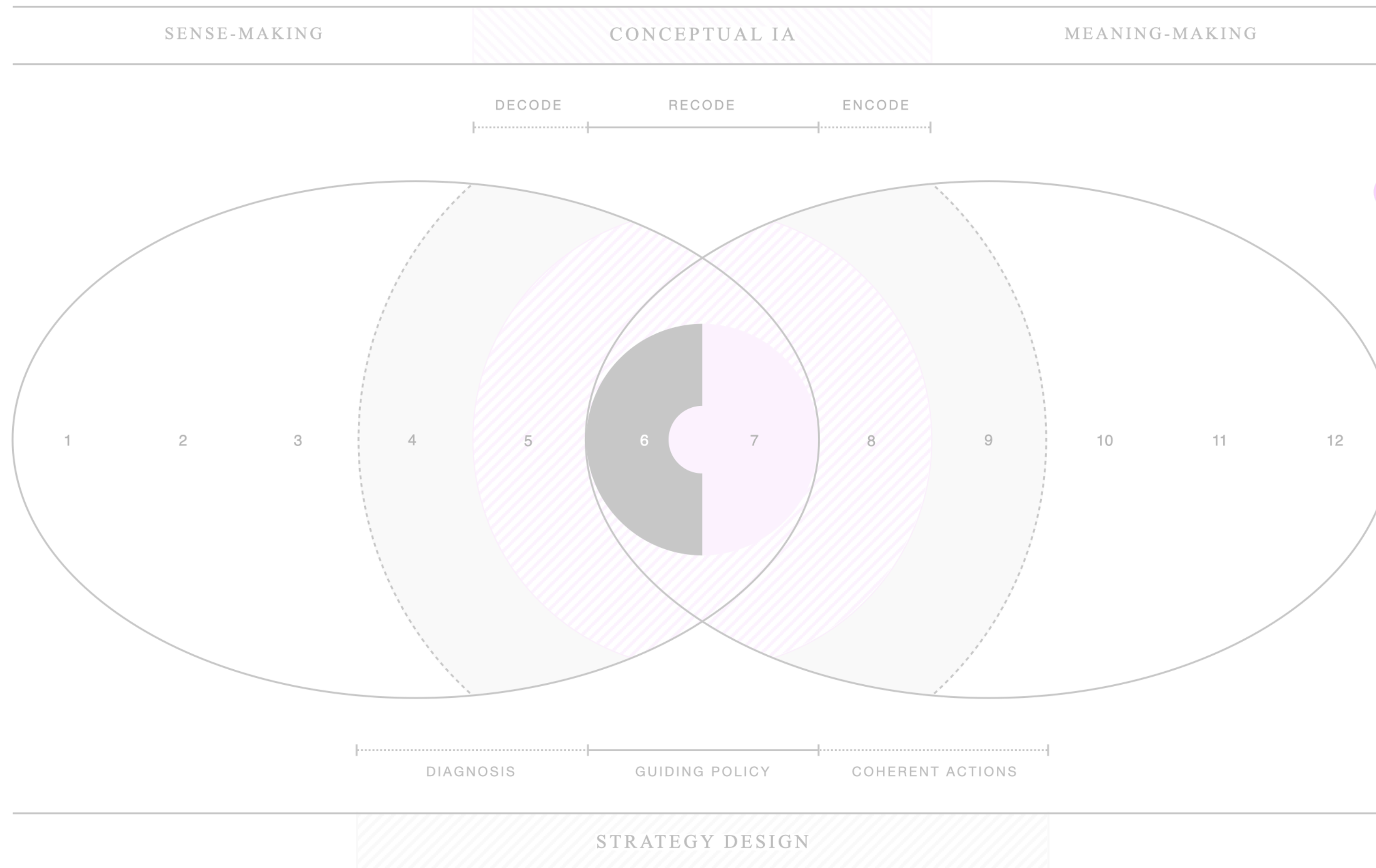
- 9. Concept Development
- 10. The RW Journey v2
- 11. The Solution Landscape
- 12. Lo-fi Prototyping



7. CIA CONCEPT
 + STRUCTURAL LOGIC
 + SEMANTIC FORMATION



6. DESIGN STRATEGY
 + AIM
 + CONCEPT
 + APPROACH



7. CIA CONCEPT

- + STRUCTURAL LOGIC
- + SEMANTIC FORMATION

6. DESIGN STRATEGY

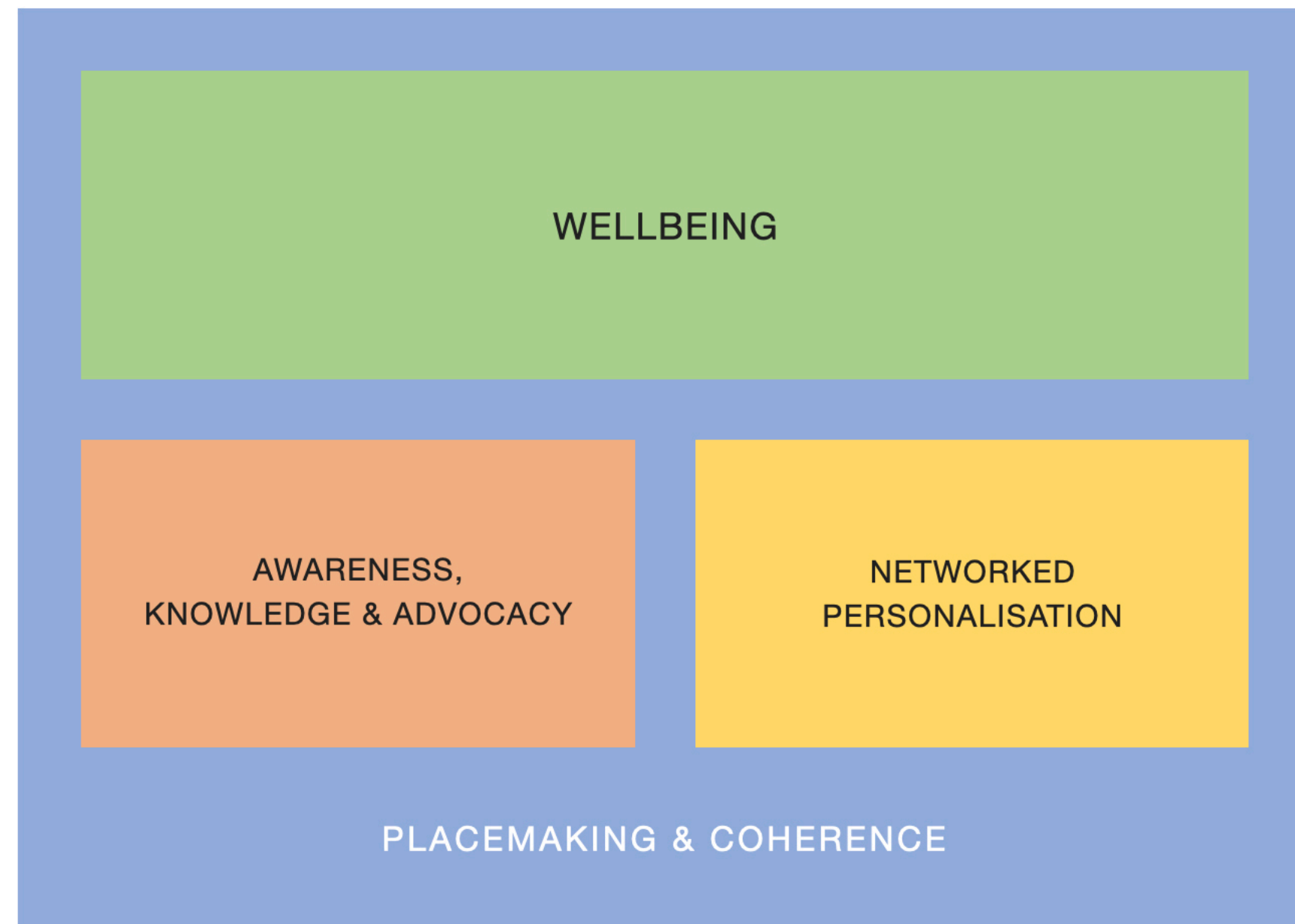
- + AIM
- + CONCEPT
- + APPROACH

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3. Research Synthesis
4. Problem Framing

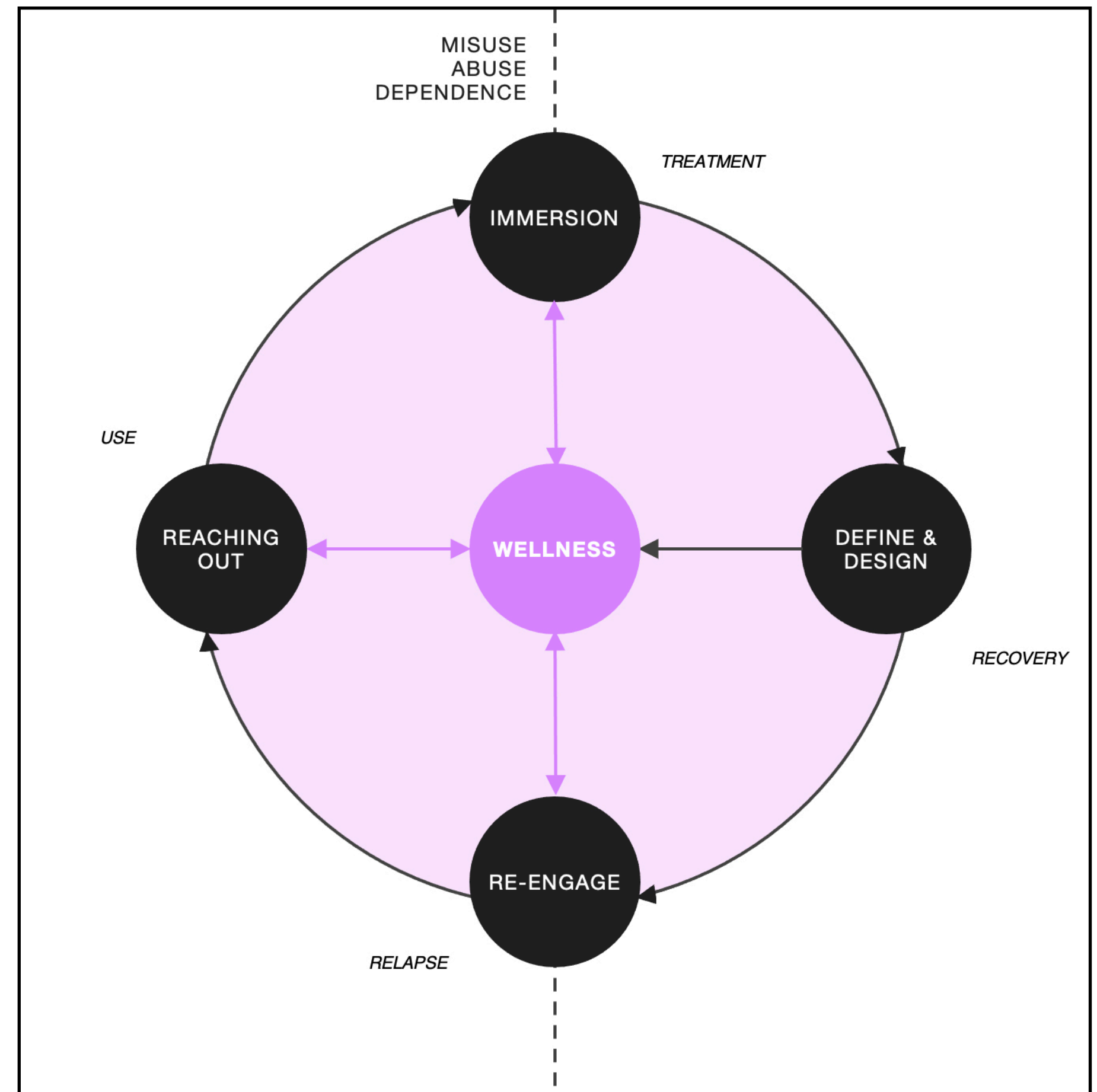
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STRUCTURAL LOGIC

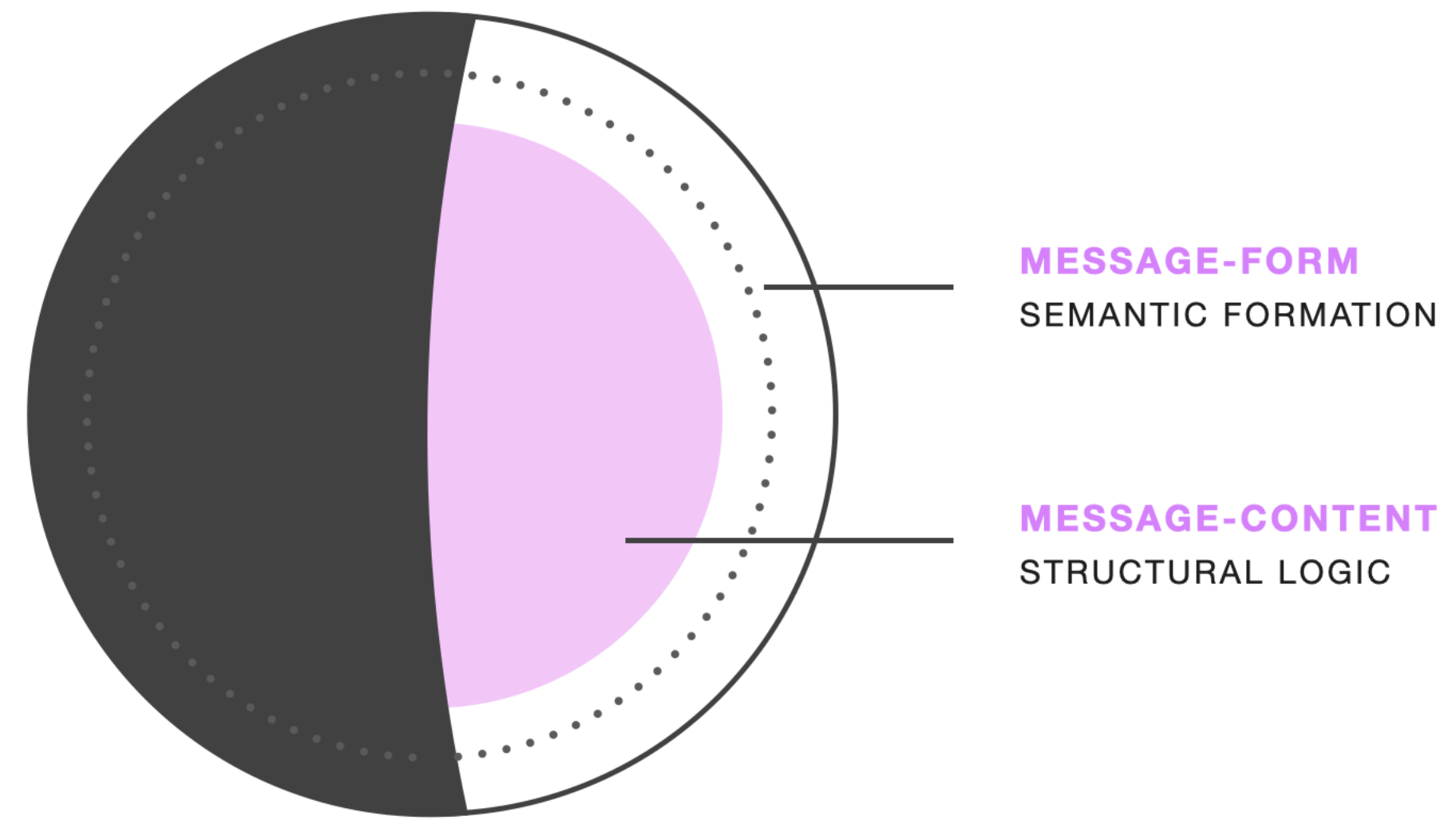


SEMANTIC FORMATION



THE SOLUTION TO ADDICTION?

RADICAL MEANING IN LIFE



THE RECOVERY WELLNESS CONCEPT



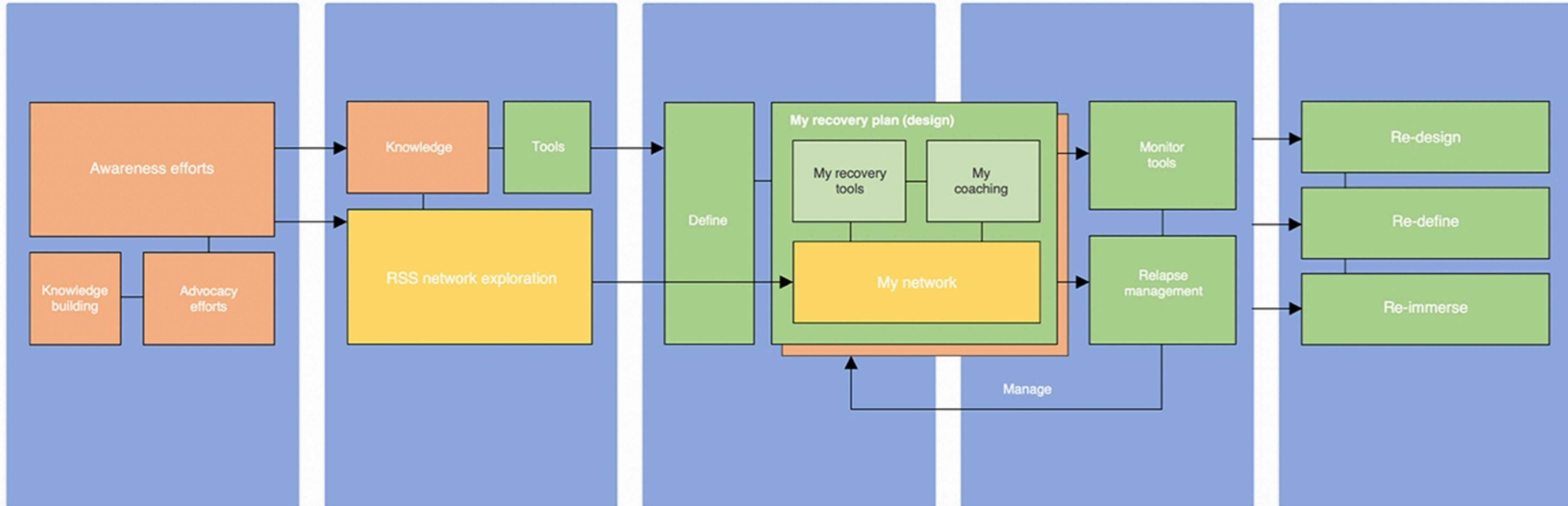
REACHING OUT

IMMERSION

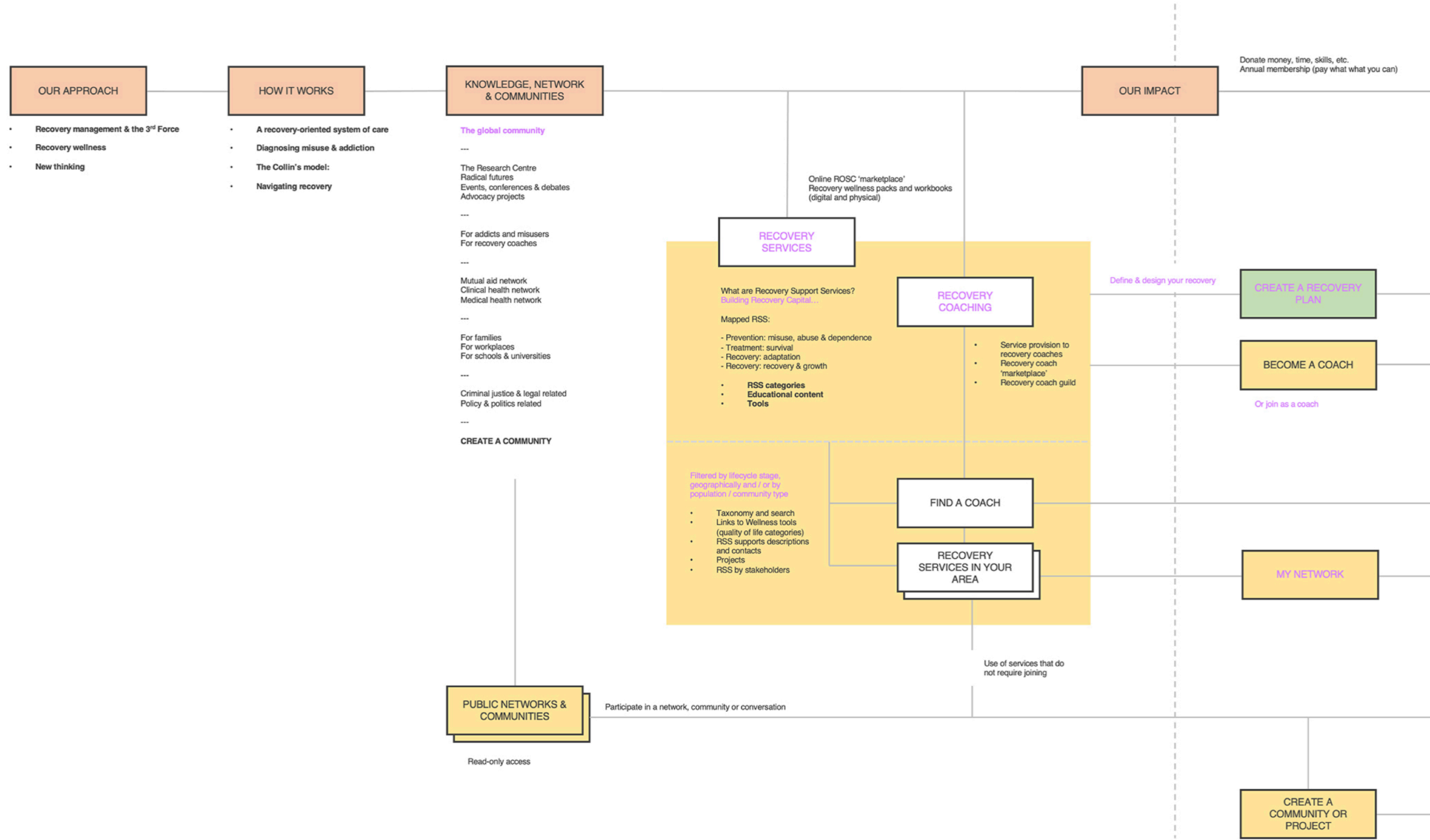
DEFINE & DESIGN

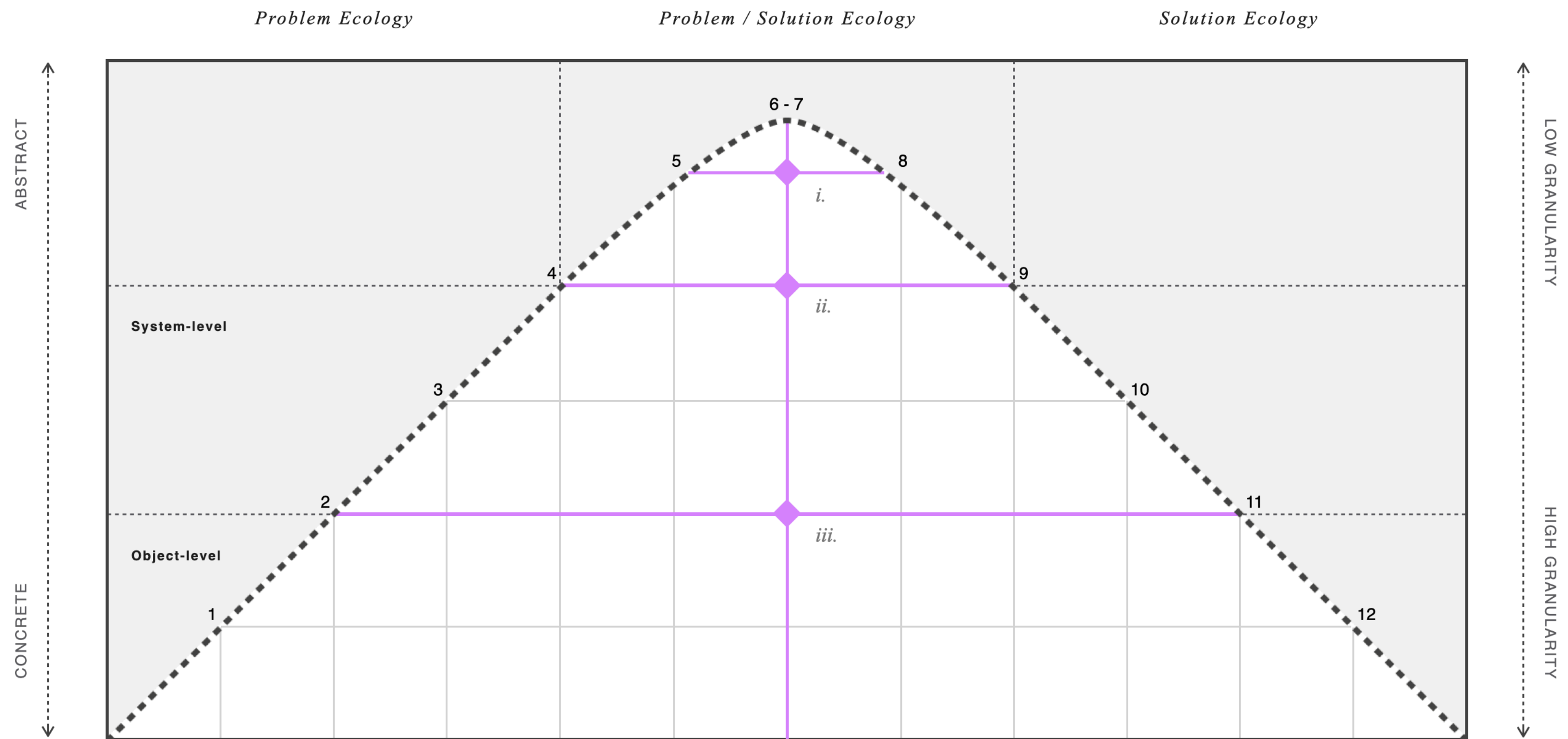
WELLNESS

RE-ENGAGE



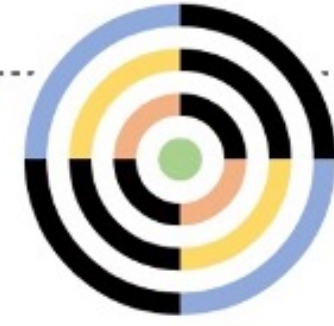
- PLACEMAKING & COHERENCE
- AWARENESS, KNOWLEDGE & ADVOCACY
- NETWORKED PERSONALISATION
- WELLBEING



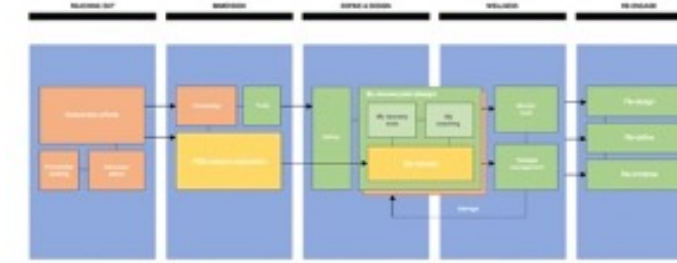


7. The RW Concept

Concept-level



8. The RW Journey v1



9. Concept Development

System-level

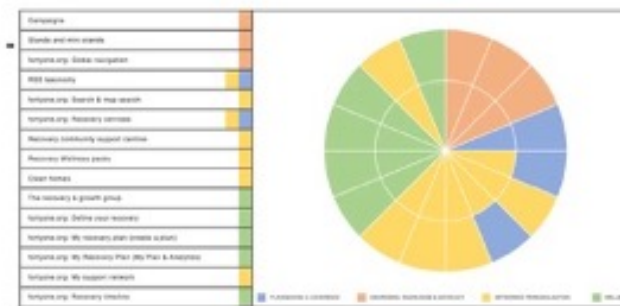


10. The RW Journey v2



11. The Solution Landscape

Object-level



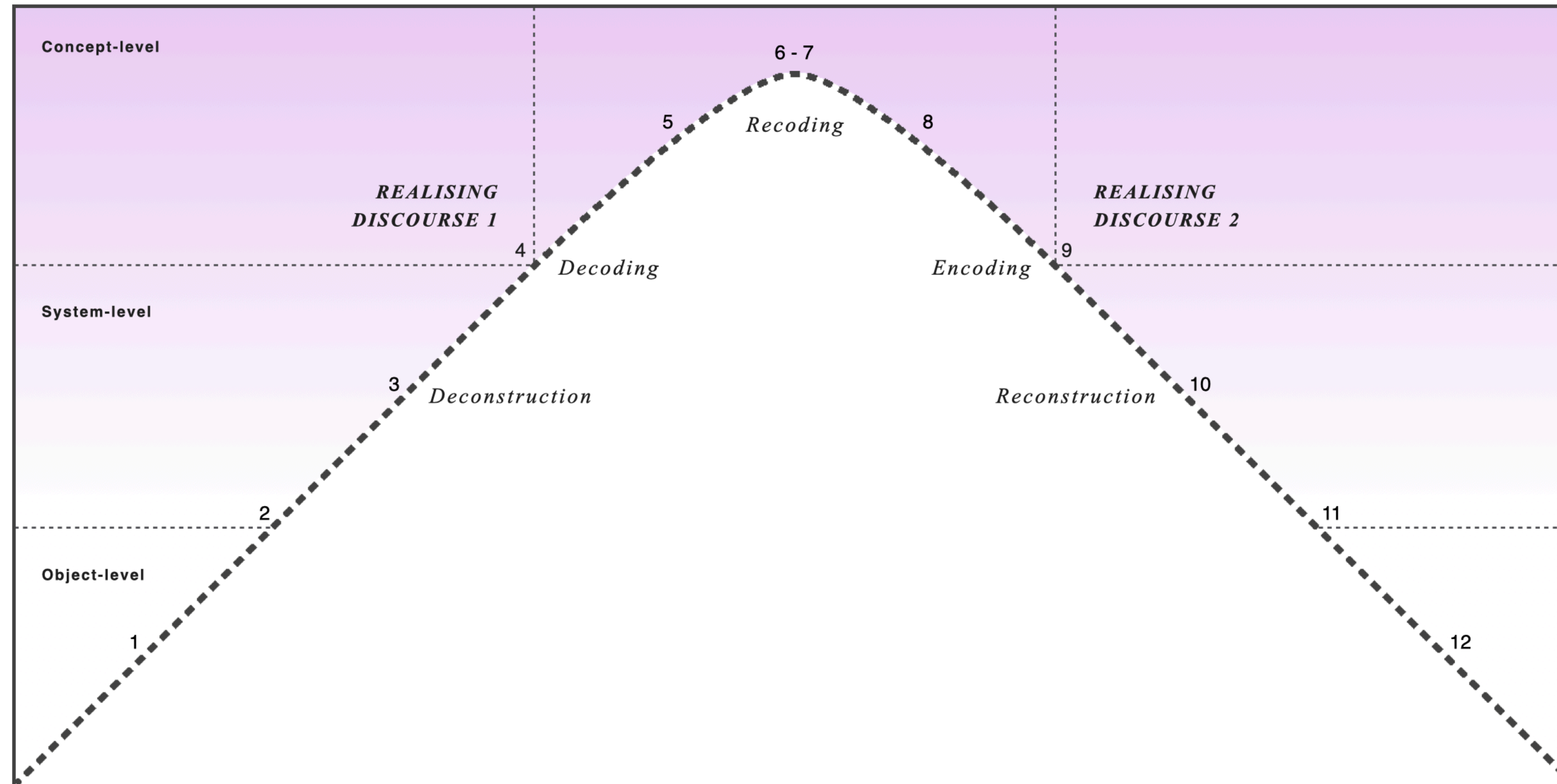
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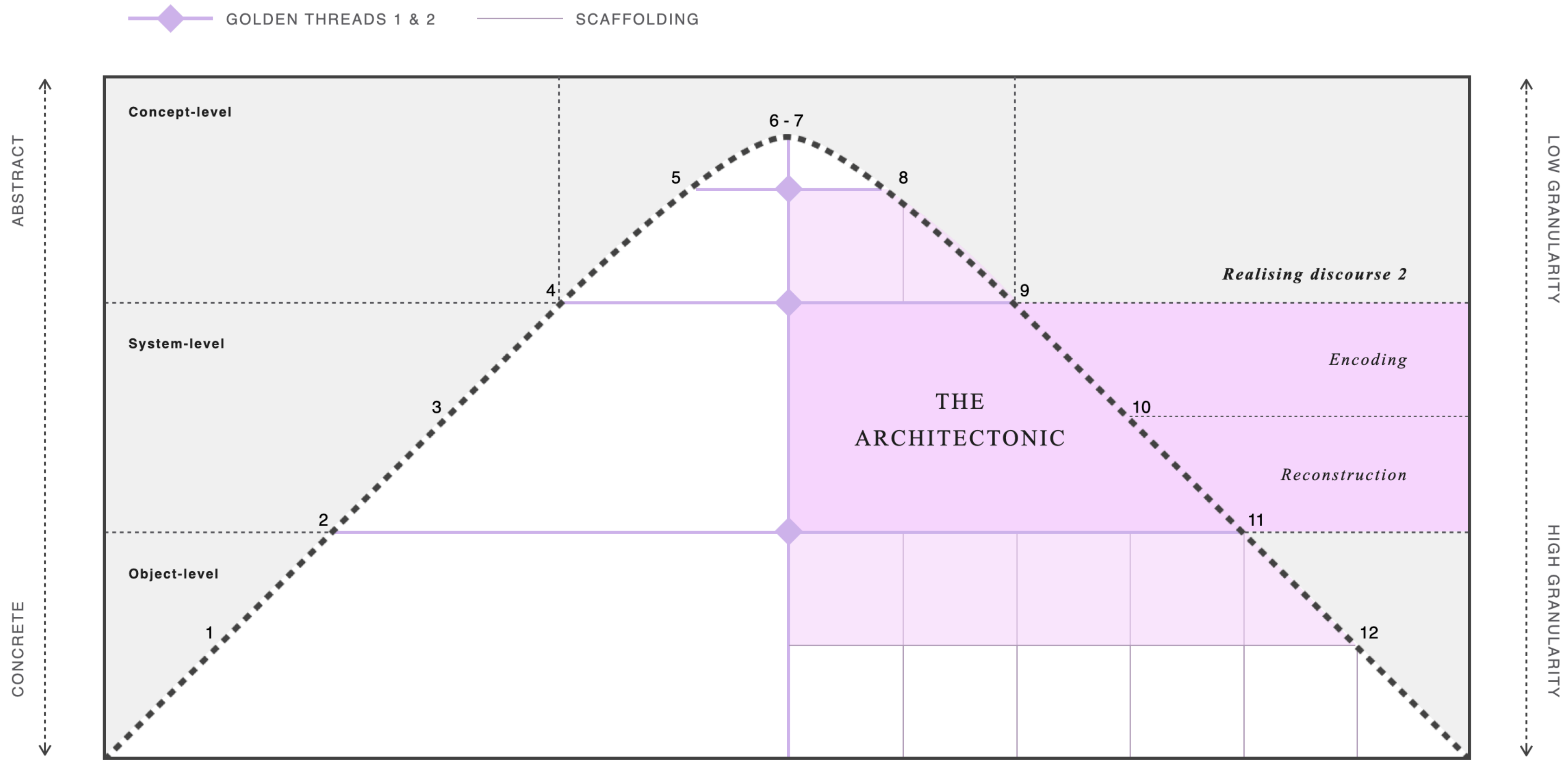


Problem Ecology

Problem / Solution Ecology

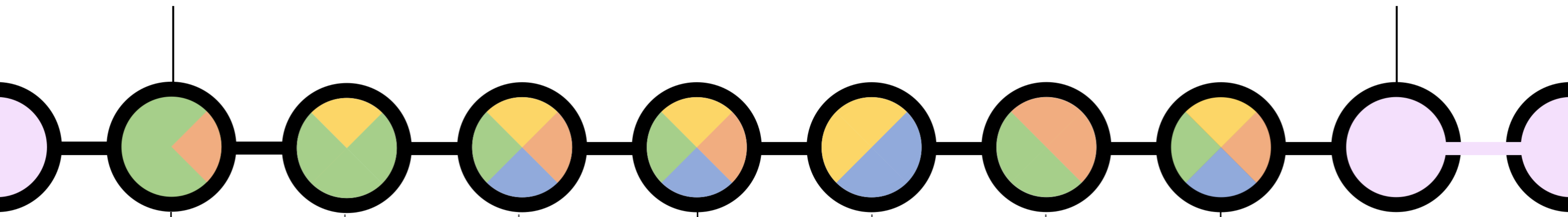
Solution Ecology





→ THE DEFINE & DESIGN JOURNEY

→ THE WELLNESS JOURNEY



**DEFINE
YOUR RECOVERY**

**DESIGN
YOUR RECOVERY PLAN**

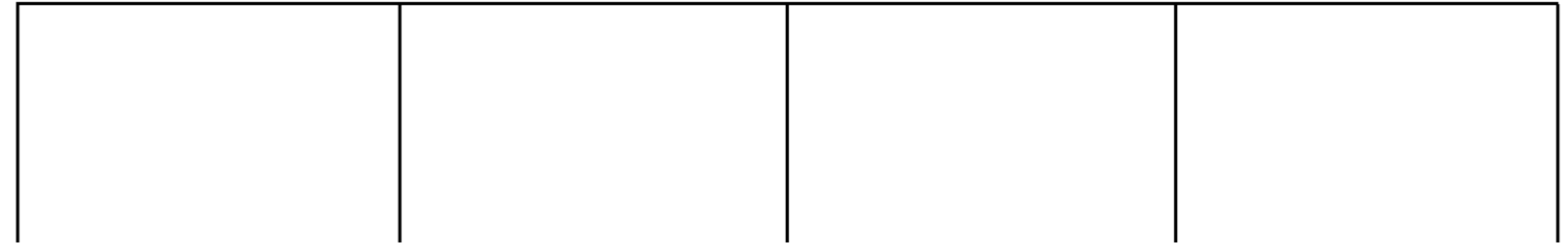
**YOUR
RECOVERY PLAN**

Examples:

- Definitions & measuring recovery
- Defining your Kokorozashi & Ma
- Determining your values

Tools:

Value analysis helper



**PLANNING
TOOLS**



**YOUR
RECOVERY
COACHING**



**RECOVERY
SUPPORT
SERVICES**



**GROW A
SUPPORT
NETWORK**



**RECOVERY
SCHOOL**



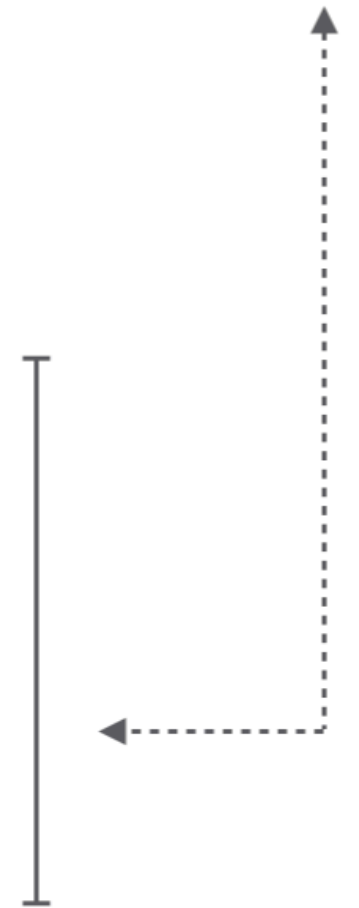
Examples:

Find a coach
Find a client

- Get trained as a recovery coach
- Services for coaches

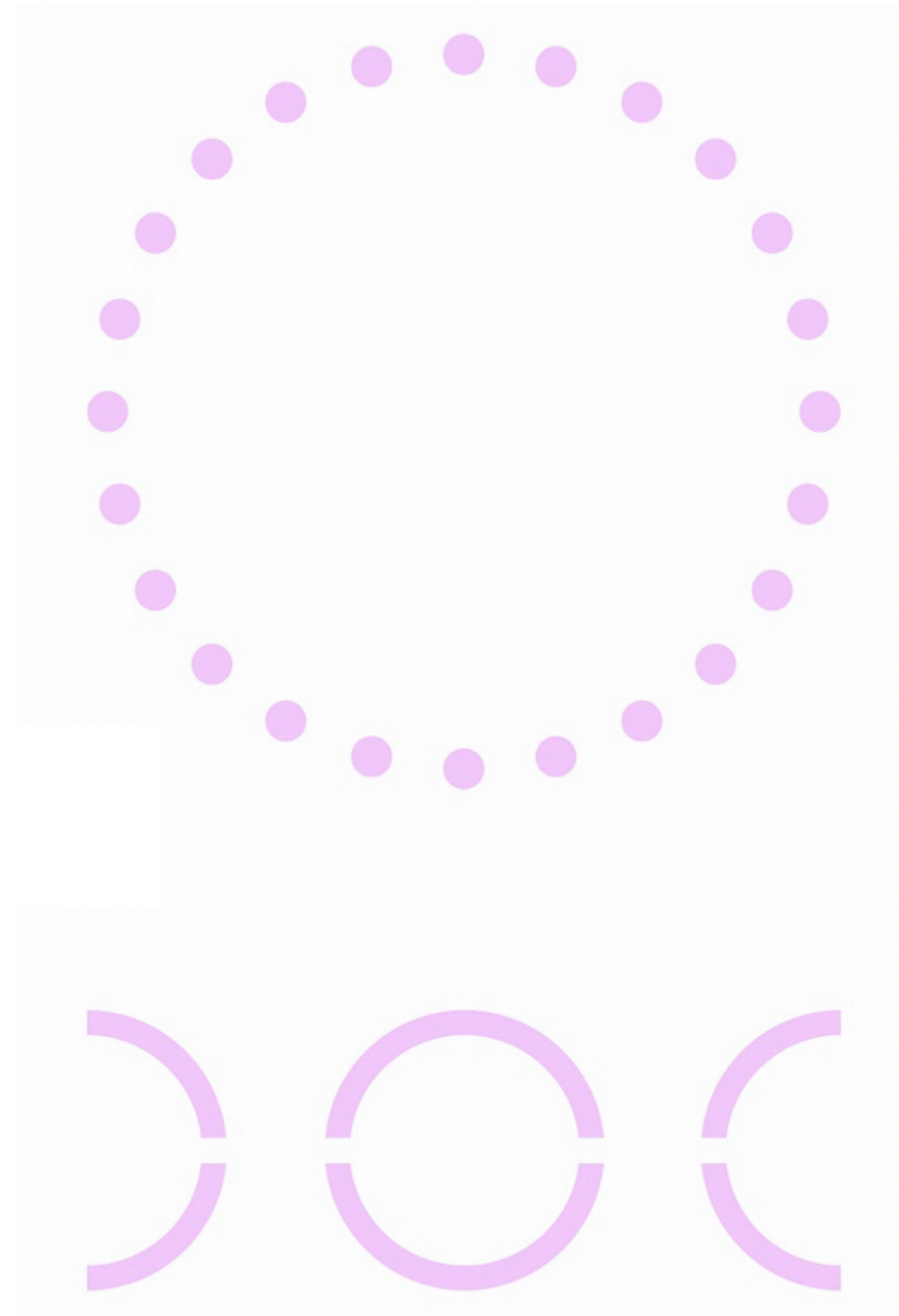


The Guild



	PROCESS METHOD	THEORY	DESCRIPTION	LEVEL OF ABSTRACTION
1.	IDEATION	Structural logic and semantic formation	A system of wellbeing & A system to be well in.	Concept-level
2.	IDEATION / PROTOTYPING	Minimal contrived ontology (1)	A system of meaning & A meaningful system.	Concept- / systems- levels
3.	PROTOTYPING	Minimal contrived ontology (2)	Each instance in the whole & The whole in each instance.	Systems- / object- levels
4.	THE WORLD	Maximal contrived ontology	A system of wellbeing & A system to be well in.	Object-level

**A SYSTEM OF
MEANING &
MEANINGFUL
SYSTEM**

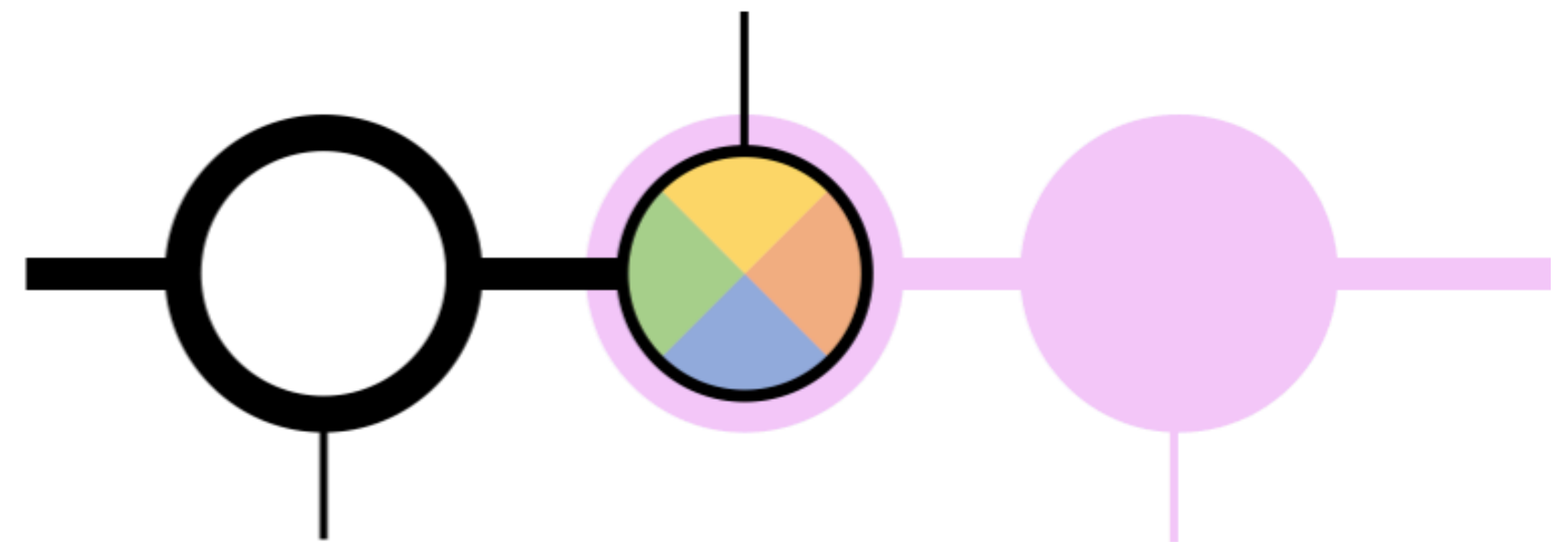


**EACH INSTANCE IN
THE WHOLE**

**& THE WHOLE IN
EACH INSTANCE**

KEY:

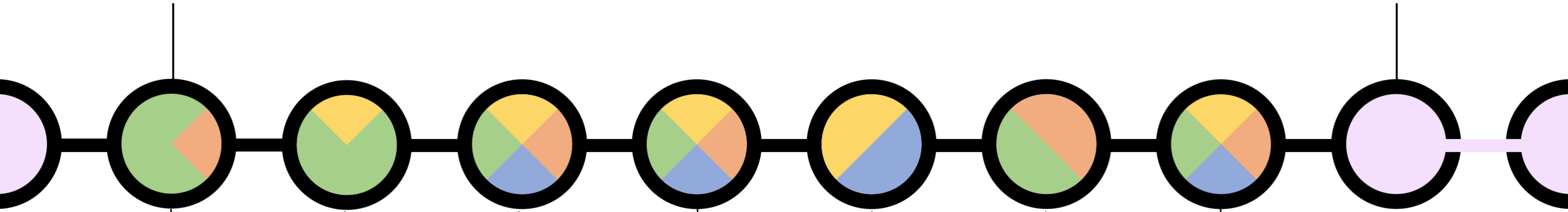
ii. The whole (as experience drivers)



i. The whole (as relationship model)

iii. An instance

→ THE DEFINE & DESIGN JOURNEY



**DEFINE
YOUR RECOVERY**

Examples:

- Definitions & measuring recovery
- Defining your Kokorozashi & Ma
- Determining your values

Tools:

Value analysis helper

**DESIGN
YOUR RECOVERY PLAN**

**YOUR
RECOVERY PLAN**

**PLANNING
TOOLS**



**YOUR
RECOVERY
COACHING**



Examples:

Find a coach
Find a client

- Get trained as a recovery coach
- Services for coaches

 The Guild

**RECOVERY
SUPPORT
SERVICES**



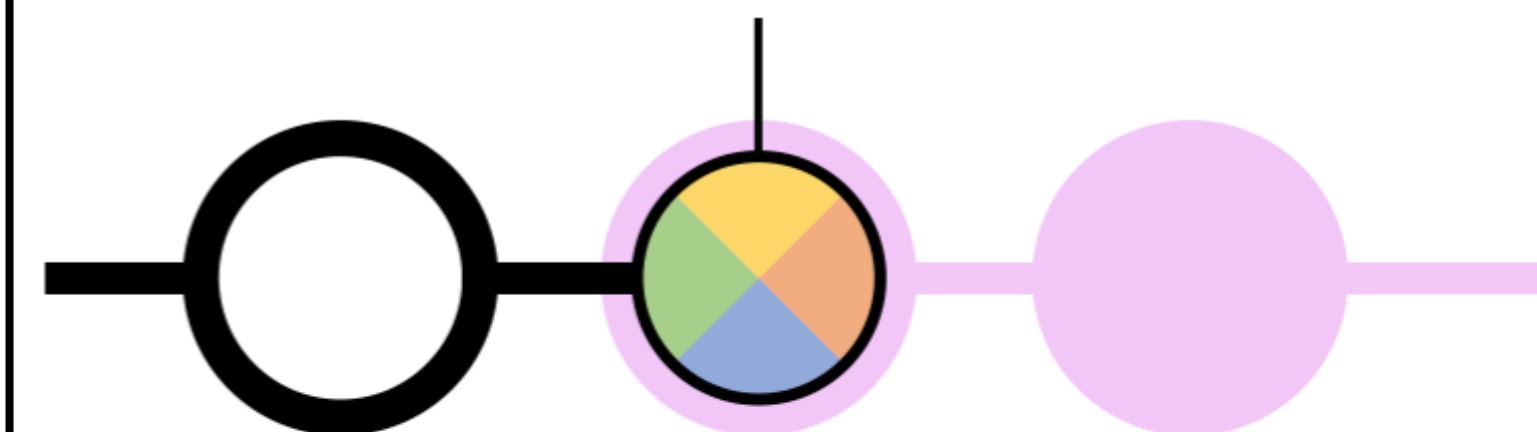
**GROW A
SUPPORT
NETWORK**



**RECOVERY
SCHOOL**



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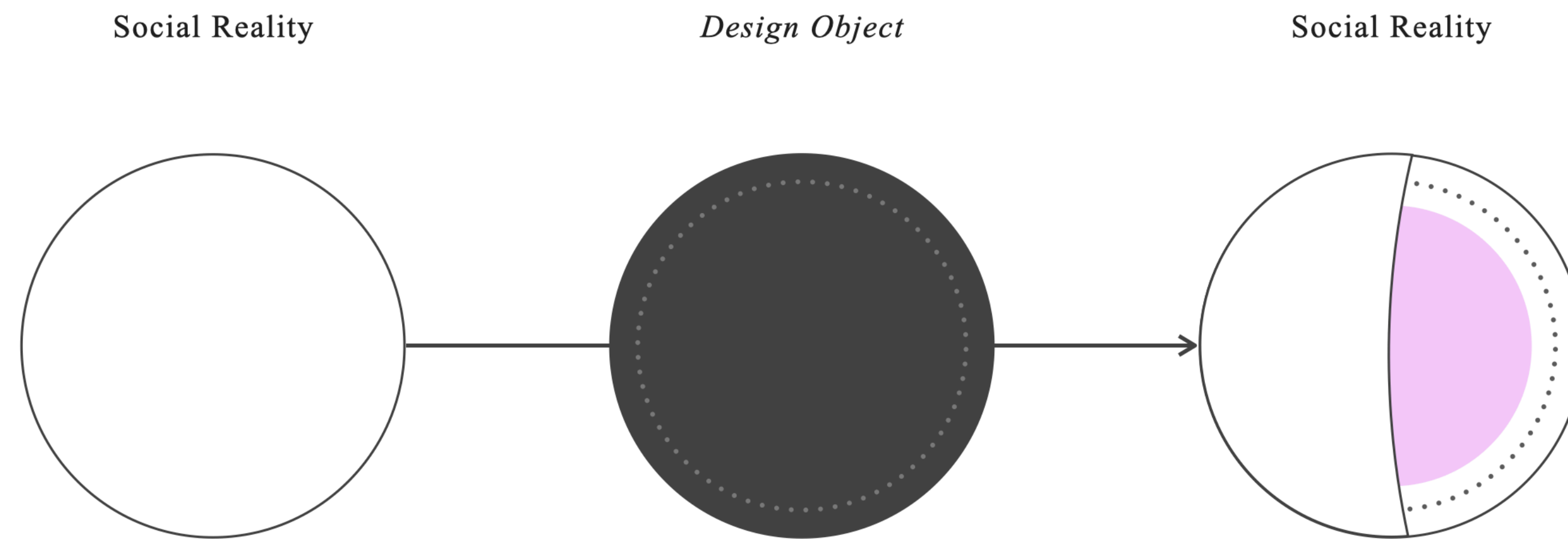


i. The whole (as relationship model)

ii. The whole (as experience drivers)

iii. An instance

AN ACTIONABLE DISCOURSE



That's all I've got at the moment.

Please email Dan all the questions you have about my talks. I look forward to trying my best to help in answering them in our live face-to-face session planned for next week.

Until then, happy days.

Jason Hobbs

2025.03.20

END OF PART 3. AND THE END OF OUR ENDS.

REFERENCES & BIBLIOGRAPHY



Slide 3

Hobbs, J., & Fenn, T. (2019). The design of socially sustainable ontologies. *Philosophy & Technology*, 32, 745-767.

Slide 11

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Hobbs, J. (2021). *Applying Information Architecture In Design Thinking : Ideating Solutions To The Wicked Problem Of Addiction*. Dissertation, University of Johannesburg. <http://hdl.handle.net/10210/485650>

Slide 27

JH_IA_Analysis_Democracy_Experiment_1.pdf
JH_IA_Analysis_Democracy_Experiment_2.pdf

Slide 31 - 56

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