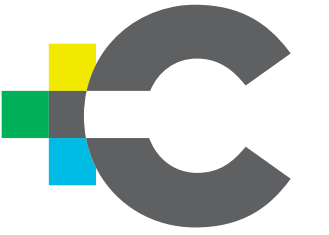


2026 MarComm Planning Doesn't Have to Suck

How to Make it Fruitful and Fun



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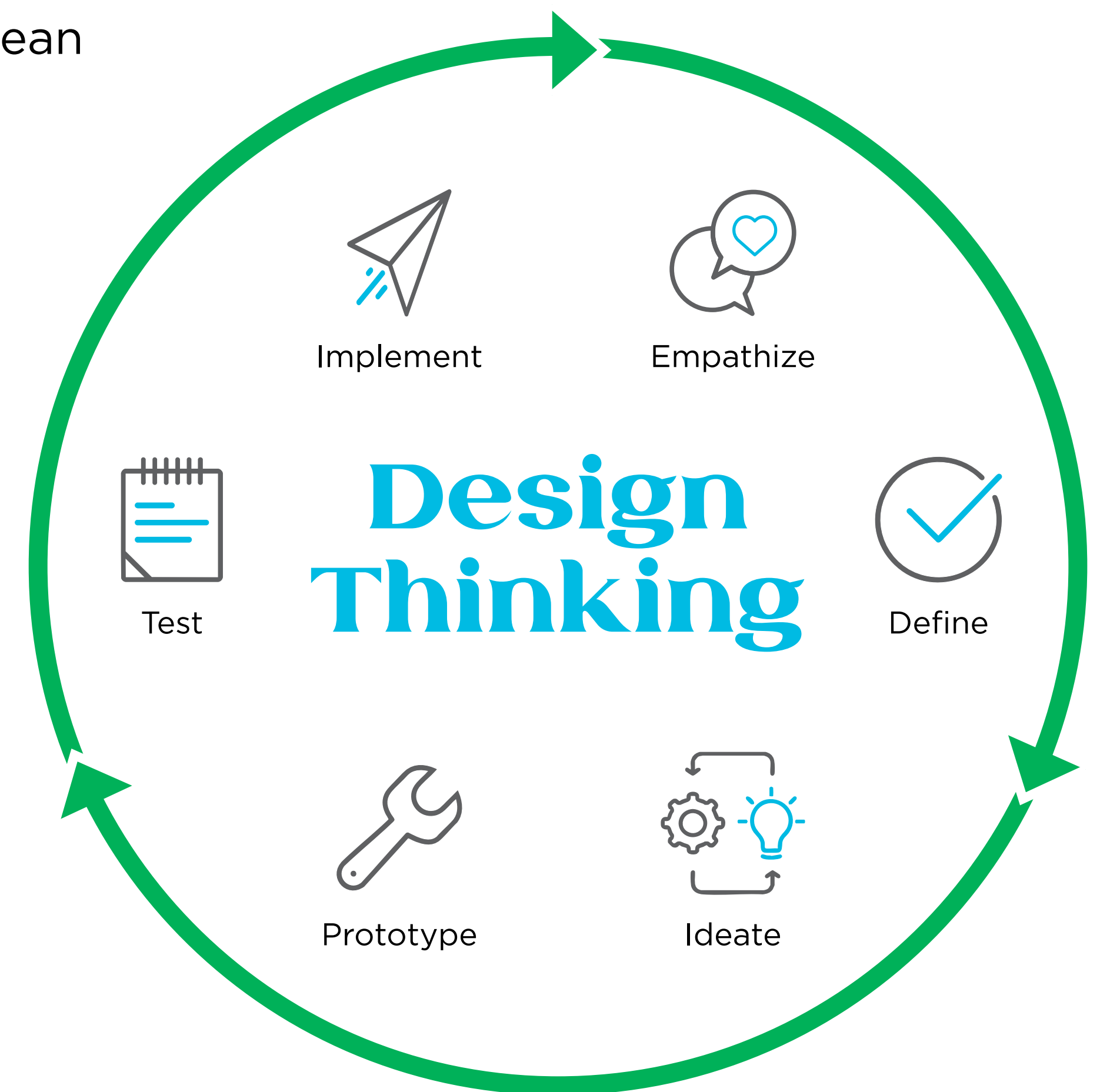
INTRODUCTION

Make planning collaborative, creative and energizing

Strategic communication planning is essential — but that doesn't mean it has to be painful. If you're a healthcare marketing communication leader, you already know planning is about aligning with big-picture strategy, setting focused goals, and identifying the right initiatives. But all too often, the process gets bogged down with siloed thinking, lack of buy-in and stalled momentum.

At Core, we believe planning processes can be inspiring. With the right collaboration methods — especially drawn from design thinking — you can transform planning from a box-checking exercise into an energizing experience your team actually enjoys. One that builds alignment, invites creative thinking and makes a bigger impact for your organization.

Let's walk through five common planning pitfalls and how to solve them using simple tools. We'll also cover how to build a brand roadmap, harness the power of AI and energize your team to do their best work.





SOLVE COMMON PLANNING PITFALLS

Pitfall #1: Skipping the human insight

Solution: Start your plan with real empathy.

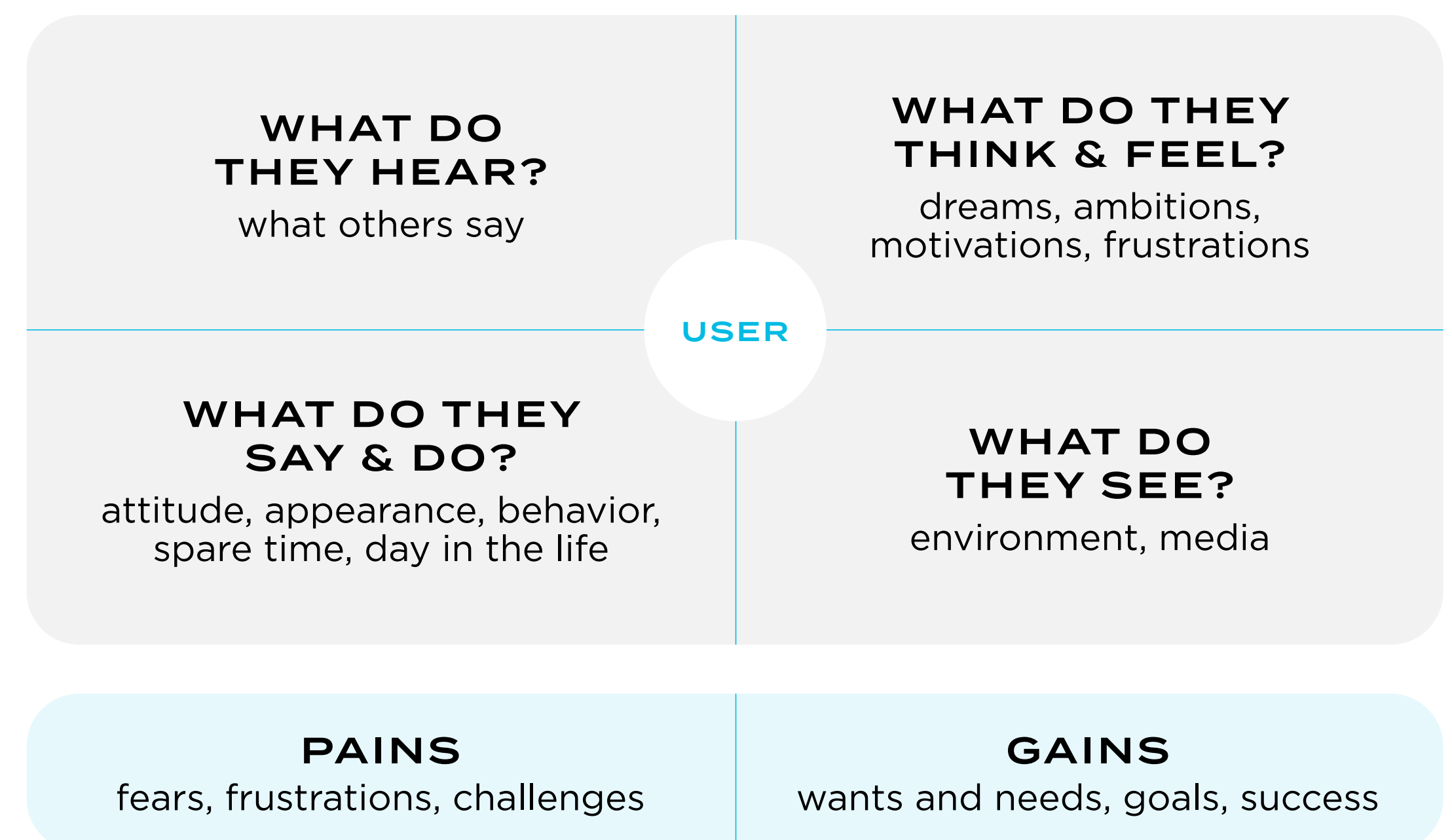
Understanding your audiences deeply — their motivations, needs, and communication preferences — is foundational to crafting communication strategies that truly connect with your patients, community stakeholders, team members and providers.

While data is essential, qualitative insight is the spark that turns strategy into impact. It provides a deeper understanding of how your team can strategically and creatively motivate people and reach your goals.

Here are a few design thinking tools we love for cultivating empathy:

- **1:1 Interviewing:** In-depth conversations that uncover beliefs and behavior patterns.

- **Contextual Inquiry:** Observing people in their own environments.
- **Stakeholder Mapping:** Visualizing who's involved and how they think.
- **Empathy Mapping:** Documenting thoughts, feelings, pains and gains.



These methods don't need to be time-consuming or costly. A little insight goes a long way when it comes to inspiring a successful plan.



SOLVE COMMON PLANNING PITFALLS

Pitfall #2: Setting vague or generic goals

Solution: Clarify your objectives to create alignment.

With fresh audience insight in hand, you're ready to shape objectives that reflect what matters most. Objectives like "increase awareness" are easy to default to – but the goal is to aim higher and get clearer. Try these creative approaches:

- **Predict Future Headlines:** What headlines do you want to see written about your brand in the future? This sparks inspiring, vision-forward thinking.

For example, through this exercise one health system identified the desire to “set a new standard for humanity in healthcare” and “have the healthiest, most engaged healthcare consumers.”

- **Bullseye Diagramming:** Map out what objectives are essential, secondary and nice-to-have. This tool is especially useful to fight against overload.



These methods pair well with existing frameworks like OKRs (objectives and key results) to give your planning more punch and clarity.

