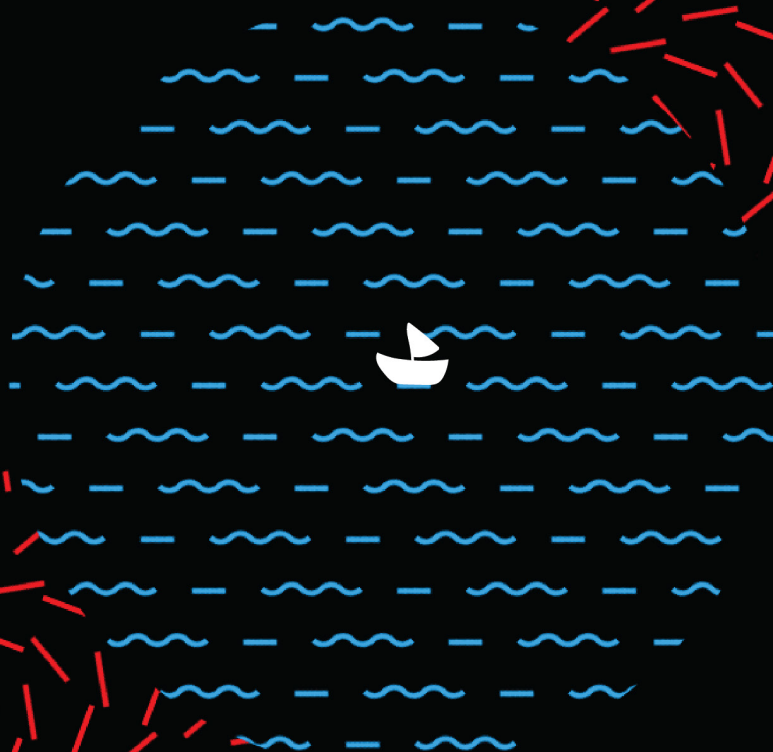# Uncovering a sonic blue ocean
Moving towards a more inclusive
commercial background music
ecosystem

Master Thesis
Tanai Mathur

Strategic Product Design
TU Delft

Uncovering a Sonic Blue Ocean
Moving towards a more inclusive commercial background music ecosystem

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Tanai Mathur
August 2023

Strategic Product Design
Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering
Delft University of Technology

In Collaboration with
Kollekt (Onbrand bv.)

Supervisory team
Chair
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Mentor
Dr. ir. van den Hende, E.A. (Ellis)

Company Mentor
Ir. Fokker, R. (Richard)

> "Idealistic as it may sound, altruism should be the driving force in business, not just competition and a desire for wealth."
>
> Dalai Lama

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uncovering a Sonic Blue Ocean
Moving towards a more inclusive commercial background music ecosystem

Be it for providing a positive customer experience, a holistic brand identity, or a way to combat stress and exertion, background music has been used by businesses for profit since the invention of the phonograph. (Thompson, 1995) Modern technology enables this to happen fast, and tailors it to the needs of the business. Kollekt.fm is an Amsterdam based B2B music consultancy focussed on doing just that: providing brand-tailored music to businesses. Though this appears to be a single service, it has multiple facets: commercial music licensing, music consultancy, creation of music libraries, and music management and playback. Kollekt's primary proposition is a culmination of all four of these, making it a high-end service accessible only to a particular market segment. However, the team at Kollekt believes that their expertise and assets have the potential to go beyond this current segment, and this project explores possible opportunities for new value propositions in this domain.

An extensive market analysis for services comparable to Kollekt (and their vision for the new proposition) reveals a dense competition space with several well-established players with a global presence, indicating that providing a comparable service and competing on standard business metrics (like cost) may prove to be futile. (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). On exploring Kollekt's client stories, an enticing new opportunity is revealed: employee involvement and well-being. Employees in businesses are a key stakeholder in its music ecosystem, yet all the services explored in the market research give sole control (of music curation, scheduling, and playback) to the business owners or managers, effectively sidelining the staff in the journey causing unhappiness and possible conflict between stakeholders. Contextual Inquiry done in small businesses in the Netherlands also reveals interesting insights. Small business employees have power, autonomy, and often are in-charge of the music (often with restrictions placed by the managers). However, there are no services that enable them to do so well, and they find themselves relying on personal use streaming services like Spotify. This is not ideal as these services are illegal to use in businesses, and not designed for commercial use.

Trune, an end-to-end SaaS background music services for businesses, aims to fill this gap and create a more inclusive business music ecosystem by recognising staff as a key stakeholder. It also aims to make background music accessible to more businesses by expanding Kollekt's roster of value propositions. The essence of the concept lies in leveraging businesses' human capital (instead of expert curators in Kollekt's current service) to create a unique background music identity. This empowers the employees and creates a better working environment for them, which in turn positively impacts the customer experience and business performance. Different aspects of the solution are also tested and validated, resulting in directions for further iterations.

The thesis ends with discussing the relevance of this concept within the context of Kollekt and its strategic fit with the company, and gives recommendations for its implementation. In conclusion, employee involvement in the background music (via the solution offered or other directions) has high potential in furthering the commercial background music industry and can simultaneously provide Kollekt with a blue ocean to grow to new heights. Scope for further research and development is also discussed, both within the company and externally.

PREFACE

A bittersweet feeling fills me while I write this. The past two years have been chock full of learning, wonderful new experiences and connections, and discovering my own identity. This journey has been a remarkable one, and I am filled with a profound sense of gratitude and excitement to share a part of it with you.

Music has always been a big part of my life. Before this assignment came along, I was looking for different ways to integrate this passion with my craft, but had not had much luck. During a conversation with Giulia (my thesis chair), I expressed my interests in music, product management, and digital product design and she immediately connected me with Boris (from Kollekt.fm). Giulia, you would make a great matchmaker because you really found a great one here! If someone would have told me a few years ago that I would be working with such a company on a project like this, I would have never believed them. Yet here we are, and I am glad for it.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me through this journey. To Giulia, Ellis, and Richard, for being a kick-ass supervisory team. You helped me find my way (several times) when I was lost in the ocean, and always pushed me for a level of excellence and detail I did not think this project was capable of. I am forever grateful to you for seeing my potential in a way I could not. I would also like to thank the team at Kollekt (Boris, Rolf, Elger, Boudewijn, Sven, and Joakim), for welcoming me with open arms and always making time for me. You always gave me new perspectives which proved invaluable for this project.

To my family, who have always loved and supported me. Without your unwavering belief in my potential, I would have never made it this far. To my friends who have journeyed alongside me, sharing insights, long discussions, and moments of shared triumph. Your presence and support have infused this experience with a sense of belonging that I will carry with me throughout my life. I also express my heartfelt thanks to all those who participated in this study, whether directly or indirectly. Your willingness to contribute your time, thoughts, and experiences is what truly brought life to this project. Last but certainly not least, I am also very grateful to TU Delft, the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering, and everyone who has worked tirelessly to provide students like me with a nurturing academic environment and a robust platform for intellectual exploration. I will take your collective effort, wisdom, and encouragement with me always.

As I stand at the end of my master journey, I am truly excited to discover what comes next. The lessons learned, the connections forged, and the growth experienced during this thesis has been immense; exactly what I had hoped to encounter in a graduation project and will go along with me wherever I wander next. I sincerely thank you for choosing to go through my work, and hope you enjoy reading this thesis as much as I enjoyed the project itself.

Tanai Mathur

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to inform the reader about the foundations of this project by introducing the assignment and its conception, the process followed, and my personal approach and guiding principles. It also touches upon how the project has evolved since its conception, in both terms of the assignment and the process followed.

Sub-sections in this chapter:
1. Assignment
2. Process
3. Approach & Guiding Principles

1.1 ASSIGNMENT

Kollekt.fm is an Amsterdam based business-to-business music agency founded in 2013. It provides a high-end bespoke music curation service for brands. They have a small full-time team of about 7, a big roster of freelance music curators, and operate on a global scale. Their target audience are large brands (10+ physical venues) that are looking for standardization and/or coherence in their background music with respect to their brand identity.

The music Kollekt provides is licensed for commercial streaming and it also offers support in getting licenses from the local PRO. (Kollekt.fm, 2021) Their USP is their hyper-personal approach and human curation: they work together with brands to first identify the right music needed, and then their expert music curators (both in-house and freelancers) provide the exact tracks and playlists. They also have a combination of proprietary hardware and software products (namely Atmosphere, AtmosBox, and Backstage) which the brands use to access and play the provided music.

Brand tailored music for business.

Hand-picked by music experts.

[REQUEST A DEMO] [PORTFOLIO]

As heard in
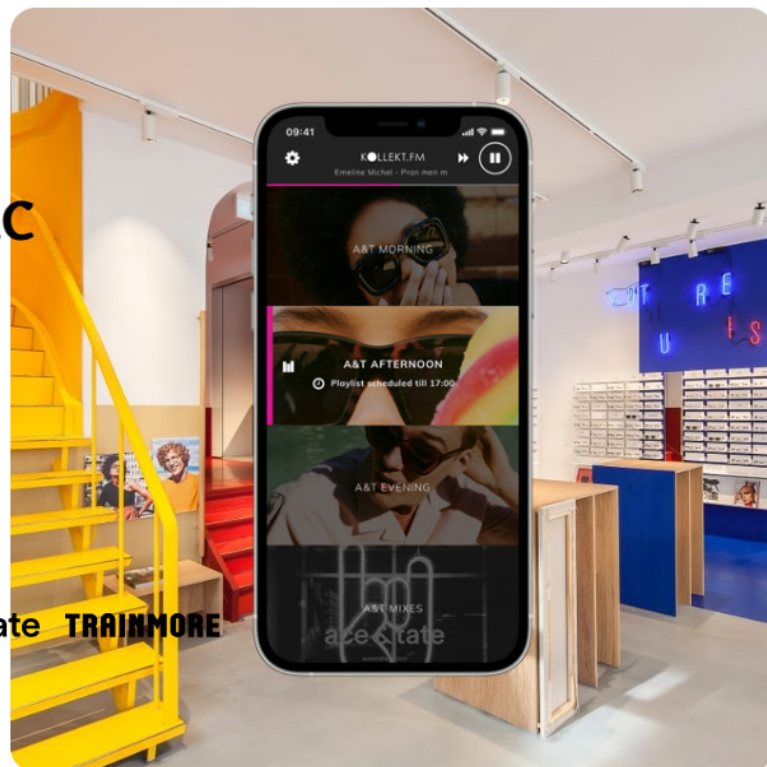
MINDSPACE   ● SPACES.   L\NK&CO   ace & tate   TRAINMORE

Figure 1.1.1 Kollekt's proposition on their website landing page (Kollekt.fm, retrieved August 2023)

KLEIN VOLK
Sandwich Achter Het Stuur

KIKAGAKU MOYO
Nazo Nazo

RELMER
Nightingale

HOWIE B.
Who's Got The Bacon?

APIENTO
Things You Do For Love

I.N.T, SACHA VEE
Love Me Up

ANDRAS, OSCAR KEY SUNG
Friendship Theme

MAY EAST
Maraka

LETHERETTE
Sweeter

FARBROR RESANDE MAC
Aniara

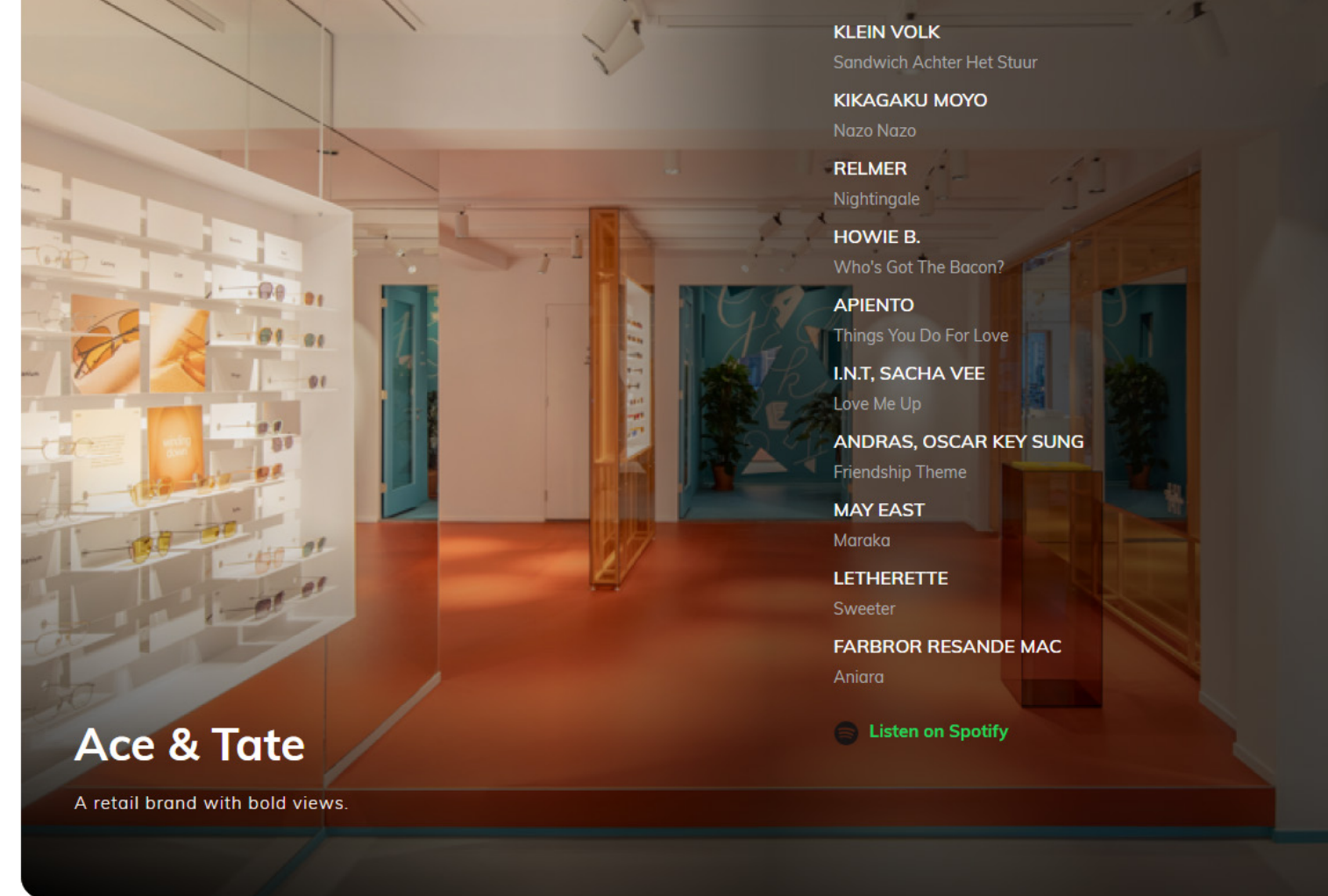Listen on Spotify

Ace & Tate

A retail brand with bold views.

Figure 1.1.2 A Playlist for a current Kollekt client Ace & Tate (Kollekt.fm, retrieved August 2023)

Having established themselves well in their domain in Europe, Kollekt.fm has ambitions to expand to new regions, especially the USA. The motivation to do so can be attributed to several reasons:

1. They already have the commercial license to operate there because of current clients expanding and partners operating in that region,
2. The license Kollekt has for the USA is sufficient for businesses to play music at their venues, which is unlike other countries where a separate additional license (usually regarding the venue size) is needed.
3. Due to the DMCA (Digital Millenium Copyright Act), the law regarding illegal means of playing music (for example Spotify, which is meant for personal use only and is illegal to play in a commercial context) is quite strict in the USA. The company thus assumes that a commercial music service may be more desirable there as compared to other regions.

Additionally for this new expansion, instead of setting up a physical presence in the new region, they would like to explore other (lower investment) opportunities. Currently, the service offered by the company is high-end, ultra personalised, and targets a particular audience (businesses with 10+ venues). These factors reduce the possibility of the current proposition to be scaled exactly for the US market, as a physical presence is a key aspect in terms of sales, client onboarding and account management. However, the company believes the new market has high potential and wants to discover and explore new possible opportunities. That is where the idea behind this project was conceived: to discover opportunities and develop new value propositions for Kollekt.fm to scale to the USA.

Figure 1.1.3 Few of Kollekt's current clients (Kollekt.fm, retrieved August 2023)

The team has also realized, over time, that due to their current proposition requiring a higher level of investment (in terms of time, effort, and costs), their target segment is constrained to bigger businesses. Smaller businesses (less than 10 venues) that do not have the resources to afford such a service, end up going for other means of acquiring music. These could be either independent music curators providing a cheaper service, cheaper commercial music streaming services like SoundtrackYourBrand, or illegal sources such as Spotify. The company has recently discovered a new proposition (called the partner proposition) which helps them unlock a bigger audience. However, they believe that Kollekt has the assets and capabilities to go even further.

However, over the course of the project it was discovered that though the USA is an enticing new market, there is a broader ambition behind this assignment. Over time, the company has built great products, acquired deep industry knowledge, and created an extensive network of music curators. There is an inherent belief within the team that the current propositions do not fully realize the true potential of Kollekt, and hence the team is looking for new propositions that unlock new income streams by utilising their current assets. The final part is an important aspect of this discovery, as their goal is to not develop something from scratch, but to find latent needs that can be solved by their existing knowledge and infrastructure.

Thus, the scope of this assignment is three-fold:
1. Discover new strategic opportunities by studying context, competition, and target markets,
2. Design, test, and iterate new propositions,
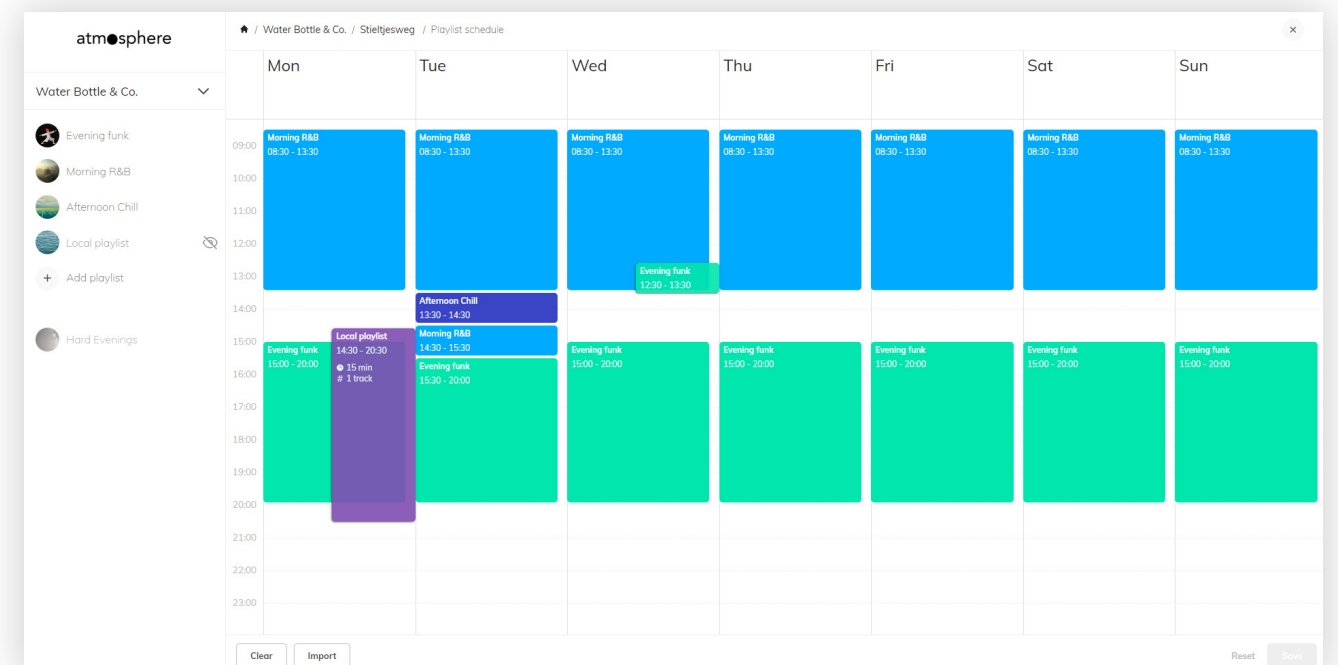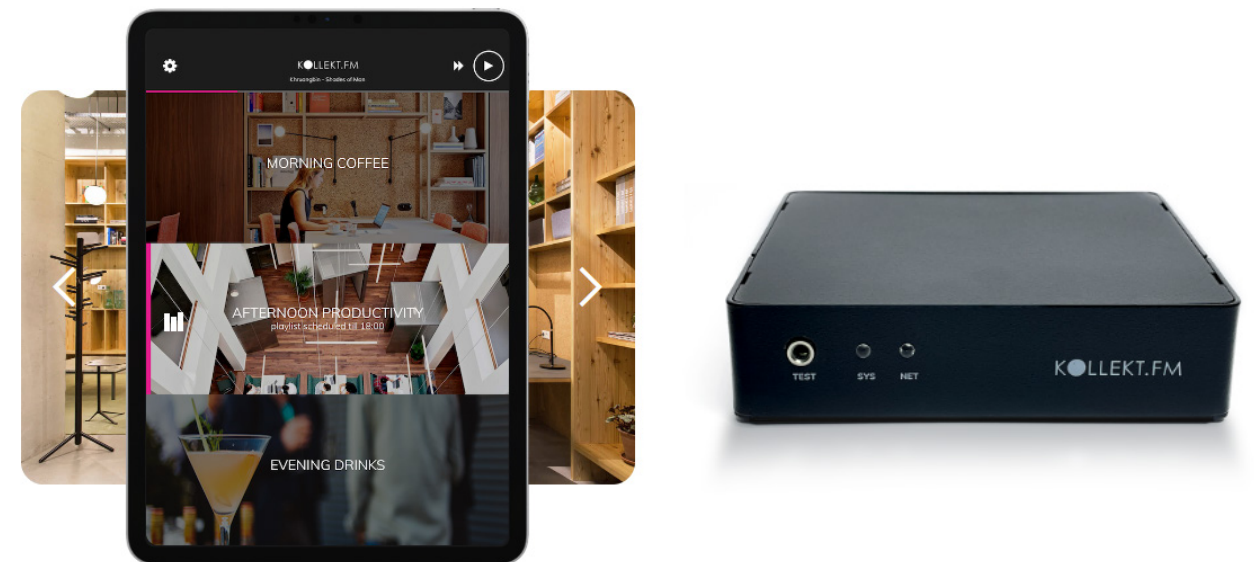3. Provide direction to the company towards developing and implementing the solution(s).

Figure 1.1.4 Kollekt's technological assets (clockwise from left) Atmosphere, Atmosbox, Backstage
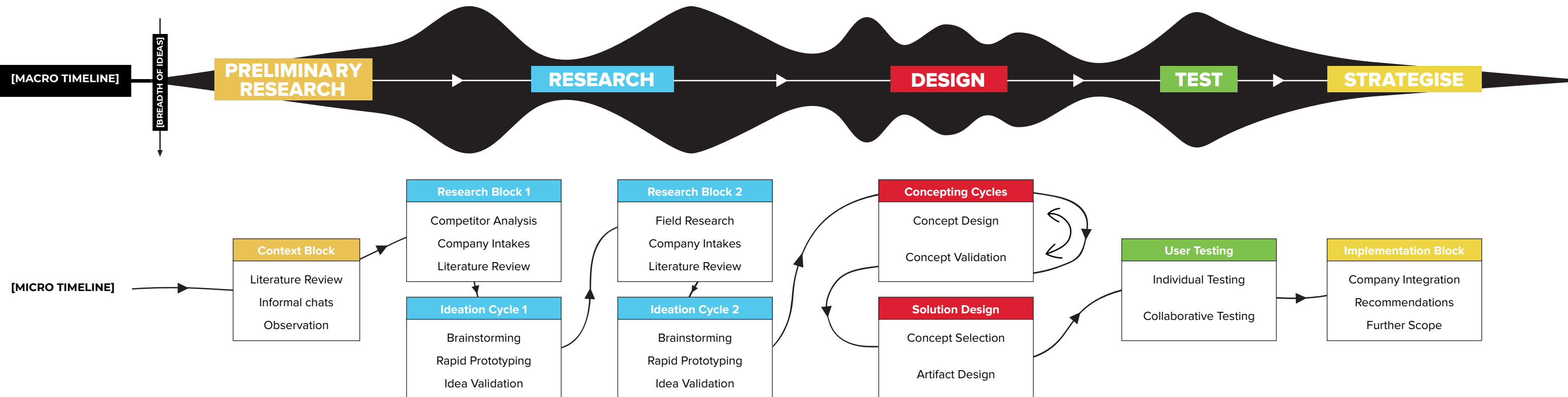
1.2 PROCESS

Figure 1.2.1 Process Diagram with macro and micro timelines

The project utilised a non-linear iterative design process with different kinds of iteration cycles. A unique aspect of this process is the constant and simultaneous pursuit of research and ideation, which attempted to fill the theory-practice gap. This means that the insights gathered need to be converted into a tangible form of value for stakeholders to understand and provide relevant feedback. Figure 1.2.1 illustrates how this process took place and the supporting activities carried out.

Working on a broad-scope assignment with a company with a niche value proposition, it became clear that a deep dive into the context is necessary to understand the assignment further and go deeper into the company's motivations. This formed the first block of the project: Preliminary Research. This consisted of an exploratory literaure review of topics covered in the project brief, informal chats with different stakeholders, and an active observation of background music in businesses. Once a basic understanding of the key concepts in this assignment was developed, the research phase began.

This took place in two research-ideation blocks, with constant validation of the ideas being created and discovered. For the sake of easier understanding, the activities have been presented almost linearly in this thesis. However, the true process was much more iterative and resembled the above figure.

The first research block gave way to broad directions, and several ideas were created and validated with the Kollekt team to gauge alignment. This block was exploratory and gave way to more clarity and alignment with respect to the assignment and its surrounding context.

The results of this block also gave way to some promising new directions. A second, more focussed research phase was carried out, with another ideation phase putting the directions into tangible outcomes. The outcomes were again validated and gave rise to concrete directions well-grounded in theoretical and empirical research.

The directions from this phase led to the design block, which consisted of three feedback cycles (involving me, the supervisory team, and Kollekt), leading to the final solution. This solution was extensively tested in different forms, which provided directions for further development and iteration.

Lastly, the implementation and strategic aspect of the solution was developed. This has been discussed in this thesis in the form of recommendations to the company, discussing the strategic fit and company integration, and putting forward the limitations and future scope this project presents.

1.3 APPROACH & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Along with the process and methodology followed for this project, it is also important to highlight my personal approach and principles that guided me throughout. These principles primarily stem from my personal motivations and ambitions and have played a big role in the form this project has taken. as they played a vital role in shaping my approach and mindset.
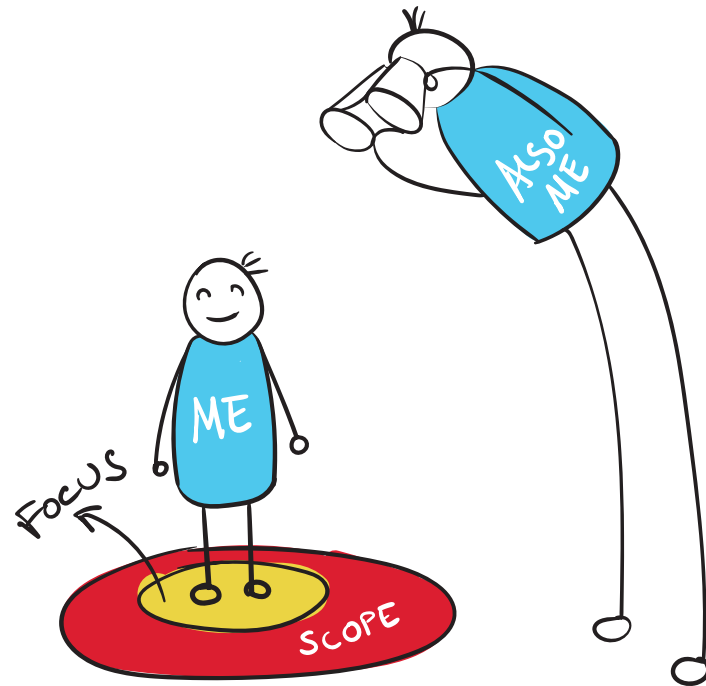

Figure 1.3.1 Constantly stepping in and out of the problem-solution space

Stepping in & out

This principle emphasises the importance of switching between different (micro and macro) perspectives to decide what is more important for the end goal. By taking breaks and stepping away from the project, designers can gain a bird's eye view that can give rise to new strategic or long-term insights and ideas that they may not have otherwise considered. (Martin, 2009)

In this project, this was done by allocating time in the project timeline to extensively process feedback and reflect on results. Several retrospectives were carried out throughout the process to understand what is working and what is not, which helped make the process more robust and streamlined. The project's decision-making was also greatly influenced by this approach as various angles were explored before proceeding with a direction.

Fail fast, fail often

This principle encourages to create and test multiple design solutions quickly, with the understanding that not all of them will succeed. By embracing failure and learning from it, designers can refine their ideas and ultimately create better designs. (Ries, 2011) This principle also puts focus on creating a minimum viable product (MVP) and gather feedback from users early on. This way, latent needs can be identified, and design issues can be addressed before investing too much time and resources in a solution that may not meet user needs. (Brown, 2009 and Kim & Mauborgne, 2004)

In this project, this was done by rapid exploration of multiple directions and their constant validation. The exploration took many forms, but all had a single goal: to communicate and test possible hypothesis and propositions. Failed hypotheses offered a deeper insight into the domain being explored, and made the re-routing more fruitful.
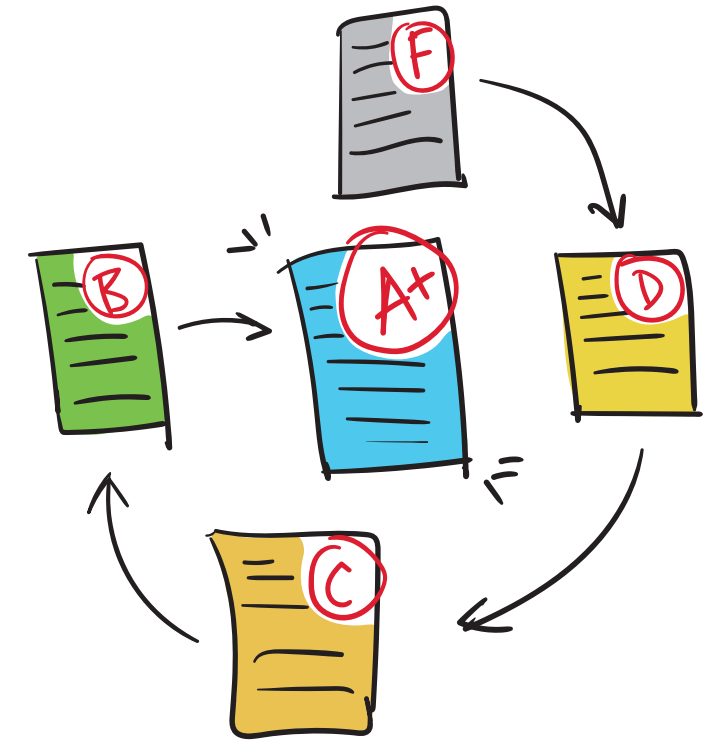
Figure 1.3.2 Fail fast, fail often

Collaboration is Key

To deliver a high-value result, it is vital to consider how different parts of the solution affects various actors. This principle reinforced the importance of collaboration between designers all the stakeholders involved (internal and external). By working together with a diverse group of people in the design process, designers can gain new insights, identify potential issues, and ultimately create a better end-result. (Kimbell, 2011; Sanders & Stappers, 2014)

Collaboration in this project took many forms, such as high (Kollekt) team involvement throughout the project, several cocreation sessions with different actors, and contextual inquiry with target users and environments.
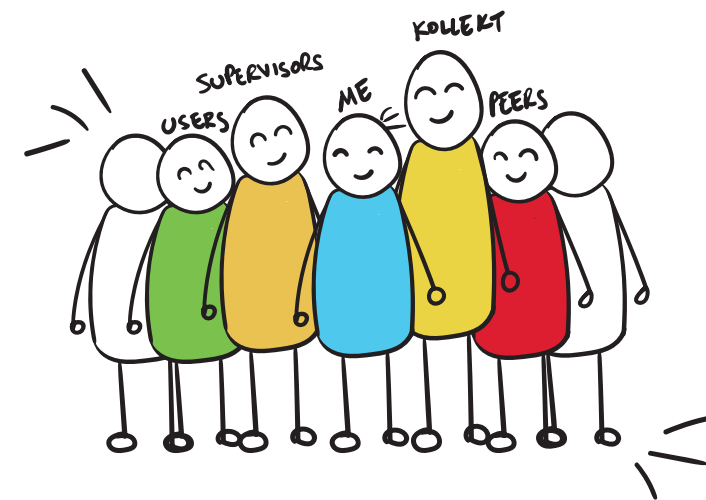
Figure 1.3.3 Collaboration is essential to design

2. CONTEXT

The project commenced with a preliminary research phase to establish a contextual understanding of the assignment. This involved investigating various aspects such as background music, its relevance in business settings, the legal requirements associated with its use. The chapter concludes by presenting key takeaways of the context and introduction chapters combined.

Sub-sections in this chapter:
1. Brands & Background Music
2. Legal Side of Music
3. Preliminary Insights

Relevance of music for businesses
A study conducted in 2016 by the customer experience firm Temkin Group, determined that positive emotional association with a brand renders consumers "8.4 times more likely to trust the company, 7.1 times more likely to purchase more, and 6.6 times more likely to forgive a company's mistake. (Temkin, 2016) These findings signify the importance for brands to invest in ways to increase their positive emotional association in their customers' minds. Though this can be done through several different channels, brands with physical spaces have a compelling possibility - background music.

Music's effect on the human mind and body
It has been well-established that music is a common language to feel and express emotion. (Arjmand et al, 2107 and Rebecca et al, 2022) In 2011 at McGill University's Montreal Neurological Institute, levels of dopamine were measured in the presence of music — for the first time in history. It was found that dopamine levels in subjects, measured through functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), increased as they listened to two pieces of music: more for which they felt fondness, and less for which they felt neutral. (Kar, 2013 and Salimpoor et al, 2009) The study also shows that just the expectation of listening to enjoyable music can trigger the release of dopamine in the brain, similar to how cues for food, drugs, or sex can. These findings provide insight into why music, despite not being essential for survival, holds such importance in human culture.

There are also other interesting ways music affects the human brain and body. In a 2013 article from Scientific American about the psychology of listening to music while exercising, the author argues that the choice of music does not only depend on how suited it is to a workout, but also how it encourages people to keep exercising. On a neural level, music has the power to distract the body and mind – it competes with the negative physiological feedback for the brain's conscious attention. The same could be argued about being in an establishment when one is not enjoying themselves. If the music being played is pleasurable to the individual, it may cause the mind to be distracted and make the activity much more pleasurable. This does not only provide relevance for background music in gyms and health centres, but also any other venues where the customers may not be particularly enjoying themselves. (Jabr, 2013) A 2009 study about the effects of music in patients recovering from cardiac surgery showed sufficient practical evidence of music causing stress reduction. (Nilsson, 2009) This is one of the many studies that prove this effect, and businesses that have customers with a higher probability of increased stress can use this effect to create a safer, more positive environment for their customers. This can directly affect medical clinics and healthcare establishments, and also carries indirect relevance for businesses with special cases, like children at hair salons.
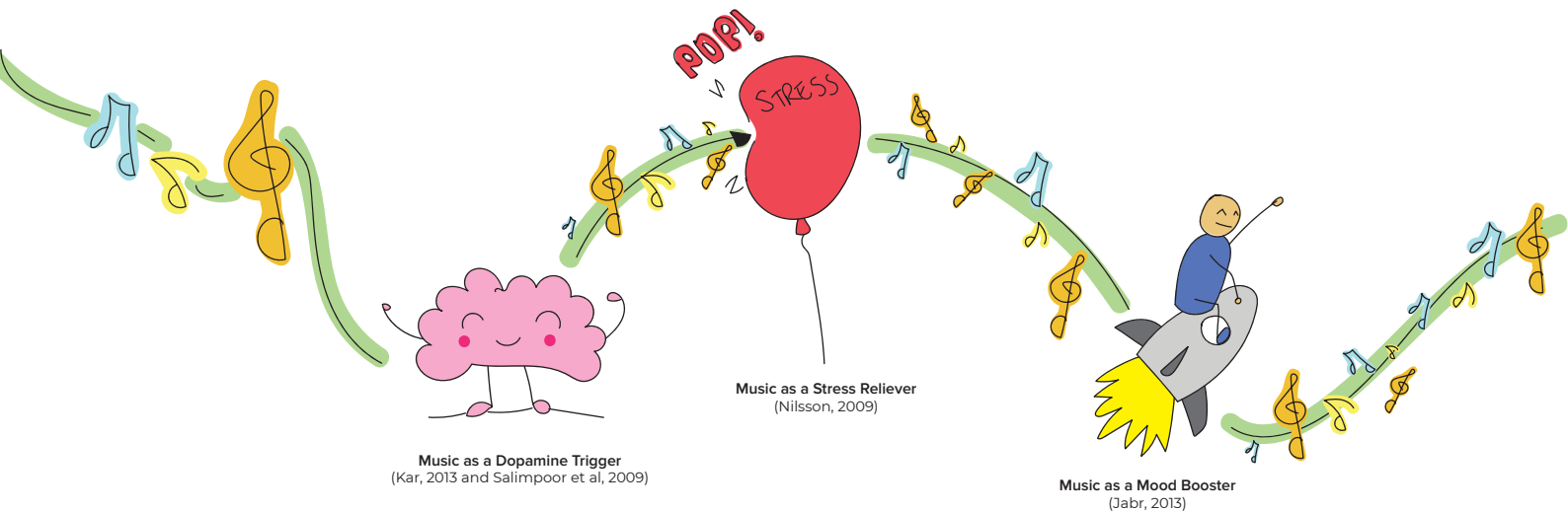
Figure 2.1.1 Music has a multitude of benefits for humans

Subjectivity in Music

There is also evidence to show that people with widely different music tastes (from Beethoven to Eminem, as discussed in a study published in the journal Scientific Reports) can experience comparable emotional and mental states. (Wilkins et al, 2014) This reflects that a person listening to hip hop can have the same emotions elicited by the music as someone listening to classical piano. This is highly relevant for businesses to understand if they want to achieve a certain emotional effect within a specific target group. Understanding their customers and what kind of music elicits what response is key. For example, playing hard rock music in a specialized cruiser motorcycle store might be favourable for the business, whereas playing the same music at a café in a family neighbourhood may not.

These studies highlight why and how music can be relevant and useful for businesses with physical venues. Be it for providing a positive customer experience, a holistic brand identity, or a way to combat stress and exertion, background music has been used by businesses for profit since the invention of the phonograph. (Thompson, 1995) Modern technology enables this to happen fast, and tailors it to the needs of the business.
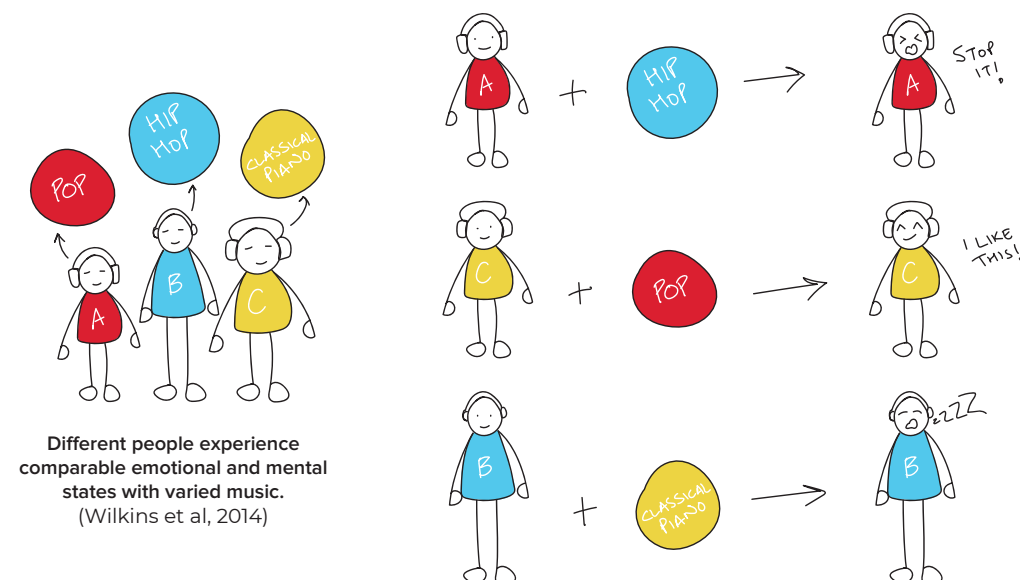

Different people experience comparable emotional and mental states with varied music.
(Wilkins et al, 2014)

Figure 2.1.2 The high subjectivity of music

2.2 LEGAL SIDE OF MUSIC

Obtaining music to listen to, from buying vinyl to a streaming service subscription, always comes with its own terms and conditions. These conditions are mainly in place to ensure fair use and compensation for the artists and others involved in the music creation and distribution process. Though general music publishing and licensing is an incredibly complex concept, we will delve deeper into the legal side of background music in this section. It is also important to note that the legal considerations for music used in audio-visual content like film and media, and also music for performances (like DJ's and music producers), differs from that of background music in businesses.

Licensing

A personal-use license, as the name indicates, refers to music that one can play and use for their personal purposes only. This can include listening to it alone, playing it at a house party, and in cases even using it for personal videos/hobby media. However, if the music is being actively used to generate revenue, or is part of a service that does so, it comes under the commercial-use category, and needs an appropriate license. As background music playing in stores reaches a much bigger audience, and in one way or another affects the business' revenue, it needs a commercial license to be played.

This means that personal music streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music, that have gained exponential popularity and growth over the last decade (Götting, 2023) due to their simplicity and low, standardized cost, cannot be used for such purposes and strict legal action can be taken against businesses doing so. The frequency and magnitude of this action can vary from region to region, with many governing bodies overseeing that these practices remain fair and legal. Hence, commercial streaming rights are essential for any business to play music in their venues.

Next to streaming rights, playing music in a store or public space almost always requires a license from the applicable Performance Rights Organisation (PRO). In most countries, the cost of a license is determined by the size of the store where the music is played and paid for per square meter. For example, in the Netherlands, Combined Management Organisations (CMOs) such as Buma/Stemra manage copyright on music and are responsible for such licenses. (Netherlands Enterprise Agency, 2022) In the USA, PROs like ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) and BMI (Broadcast Music Incorporated) provide a blanket license that manage both streaming and performing rights, so only one license is sufficient. (Brain, 2021)

Digital Music Copyright Act

In the United States of America, the Congress passed the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) in 1998, which amended U.S. copyright law to address important parts of the relationship between copyright and the internet. (Copyright.gov USA) DMCA is an extensive amendment to the existing copyright law that has several updates:

1. Offering protection to online service providers in specific situations where their users violate copyright laws. This protection includes implementing the notice-and-takedown system, which enables copyright owners to alert service providers about infringing material and have it removed.
2. Encouraging copyright holders to grant more access to their works in digital formats by granting them legal protection against unauthorized access, such as hacking passwords or circumventing encryption.
3. Making it illegal to provide false copyright management information, like author names or work titles, or to remove or change such information in certain circumstances.

Due to the presence of the DMCA, the action against illegal music practices is more frequent and serious in the USA, with huge fines and possible jail time. (Wilkes University)

2.3 PRELIMINARY INSIGHTS

1. There is scientific evidence to prove music's role in providing an enjoyable experience, adding another dimension to brand identities, helping combat stress and exertion, and creating business value in commercial settings. However, it is also highly subjective as varying types of music can elicit the same feelings within different people.
2. For playing music in commercial settings like business venues, there are special licenses that need to be acquired, the specifics of which vary by region. The providers of these licenses are called PROs (Performance Rights Organisations) and are responsible for licensing and maintaining fair compensation in the commercial music industry. Due to this, playing music on personal use services like Spotify and Apple Music is illegal in business venues, and can incur massive fines and possible jail time.
3. Kollekt has two pillars (value propositions), one focussed on providing a background music consult to brands and the other focused on providing their technology to other background music consultants. Their USPs are hyper personalisation and human curation, which they do by having a wide network of freelance music expert curators.
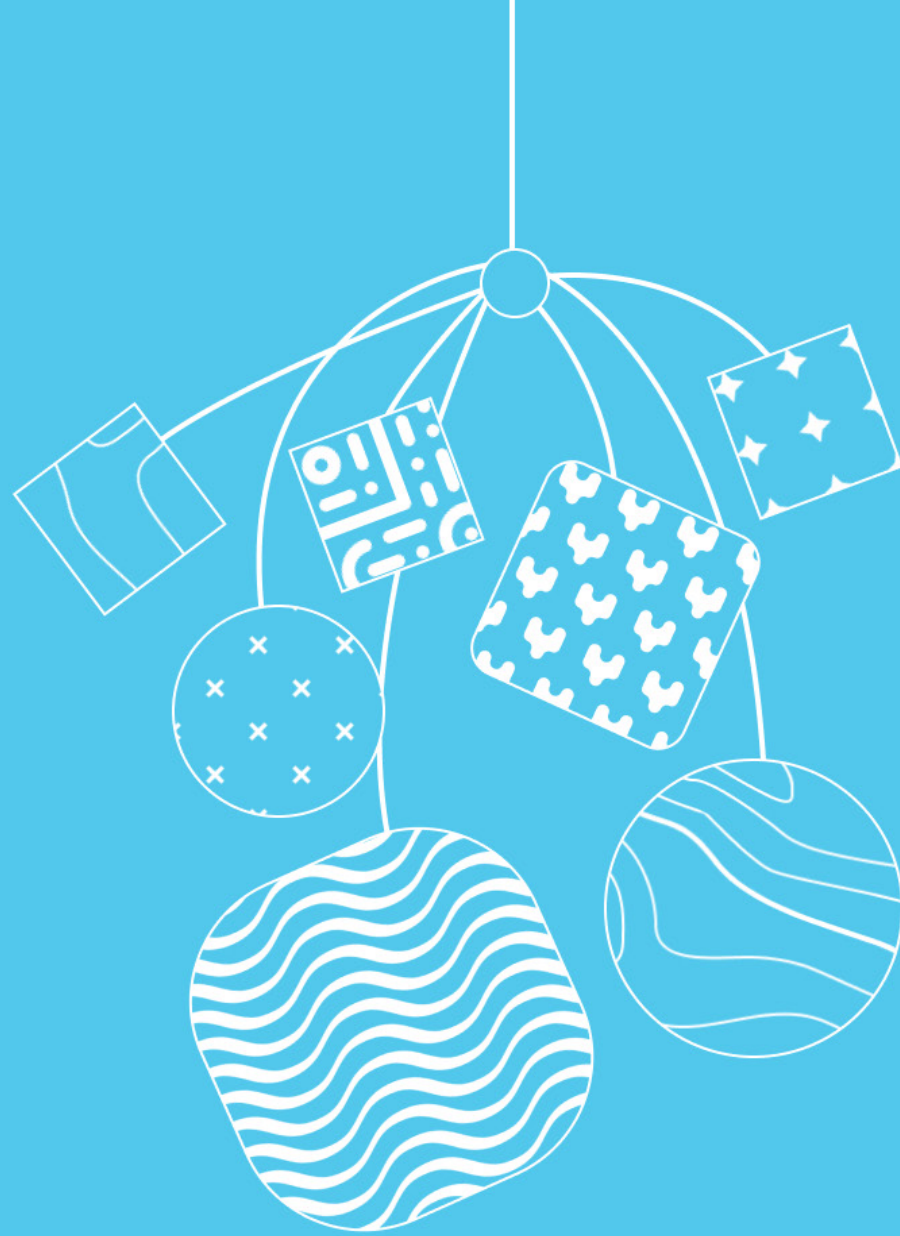
3. RESEARCH

This section dives deeper into the different aspects of this assignment and aims to provide design directions through the means of theoretical and empirical research. As this section progresses, different variables of the project become clear. Each section in this chapter has its own set of key insights, which are holistically reviewed to form the final research conclusions.

Subsections in this chapter:
1. The Company
2. The Market
3. The Target Audience
4. Conclusions

Though the preliminary research provides contextual and background insights into the nature of the project, there are still quite a few questions to be answered. To get a plausible direction, information such as the workings of Kollekt's current propositions, their motivations and pain points; the current market and competition that the new proposition may face; the current context and pain points of the target group, all need further enquiry.

In order to do that, a more comprehensive research phase was carried out with the following focus points and questions:

The Company
- What are the current propositions of the company, and how do they operate?
- What are the intrinsic motivations and expectations of the company (and individual team members) with respect to this project?
- Does the team have ideas or a vision on how this project may take form? If yes, what are the considerations behind them?

The Market
- Though it is unknown where the solution of this project may live, what kind of competition could it face and what are the market offerings right now?
- Are there any visible gaps or opportunities in the market?

The Target Group
- Who is our target group, and why?
- What does the target group currently use, how do they use it, and what are their pain points?
- Are there any visible opportunities for the target group?

3.1 THE COMPANY

To understand the client company's context deeper, gain insight into their current workings and propositions, and know their motivations behind this project, several company intakes were done in the form of one-on-one semi-structured interviews and team discussions.

Seven interviews of approximately one-hour were carried out across the product, technology, sales, and music teams. These interviews were recorded, and a thematic analysis was carried out to understand common themes and insights in the data. Other than providing commonalities, the interviews also provided rich insight into individual roles and methods of working, which will be discussed further in this section.

The aim of the interviews was threefold:
1. To understand how the different teams and individuals operate in delivering their current propositions,
2. What (they believe) are the current challenges and opportunities for this project, and
3. To dive deeper into their individual expectations and aspirations behind this assignment, and their vision for the company in the future.

Apart from the interviews, there were also informal team discussions at several different points in the project. Two of them were formal update moments (after the initial research phase and during the conceptualizing phase) to get holistic insight on the project, while the rest were in the form of informal discussions, usually at the office. The aim of these discussions was to raise questions to everyone at once to get combined feedback from all teams and have them bounce off each other. This ensured good team alignment and greatly helped with expectation management.

Figure 3.1.1 Kollekt's office in Amsterdam

Current Propositions and Value Delivery

Currently Kollekt has two offerings (or pillars): the Agency and the Partner Proposition. In the "Agency" model, Kollekt operates as an external consultant to solve their client's music needs while in the latter it offers its tech products on a subscription basis to smaller music companies and independent curators. These products (Atmosphere & Backstage) have been created with both the clients and curators in mind and have been perfected over countless iterations based on real-world feedback. Backstage allows curators to create new playlists and business owners to manage, schedule and give feedback on the music; while Atmosphere allows businesses to seamlessly play the music in their venues. In the interviews with the sales and product teams, the process and offered value of each proposition and product became much clearer.

The Agency Proposition

As Kollekt's oldest and primary value proposition, the Agency model works much like a brand design agency would. For brands looking to have a holistic sonic identity and standardised sound across venues, Kollekt acts as an external consultant and music service provider. Fig. 3.1.2 illustrates how Kollekt approaches this proposition internally and delivers value.

This proposition offers expert curated brand aligned music, completely tailored to clients needs. Though the service offered is high quality, it is also high investment in terms of time, effort, and cost, making it specialised for a certain target group: large brands that are willing to invest in the value of music. As a general criteria, Kollekt's target audience for this proposition stays around businesses with more than ten venues.

[Assets] 🔴 Music expertise 🟡 Commercially licensed music 🟢 Curator Network 🔵 Technology

[The Agency]

Onboarding
Discussing with clients about their expectations and ideas, leading to a preliminary music identity.

Preliminary Music Identity

Cold Start
Kollekt's music experts curate an initial set of music called the "cold start", comprising of a minimum of 100 songs.

Listening Sessions
The team hosts a listening session with the client, where they listen to the key tracks in the cold start and discuss iterations.

Finalised Music Identity

Curator Selection
Kollekt's music team creates an assignment based on the final music identity and shares with the curator network. They select the curator based on the submitted work.
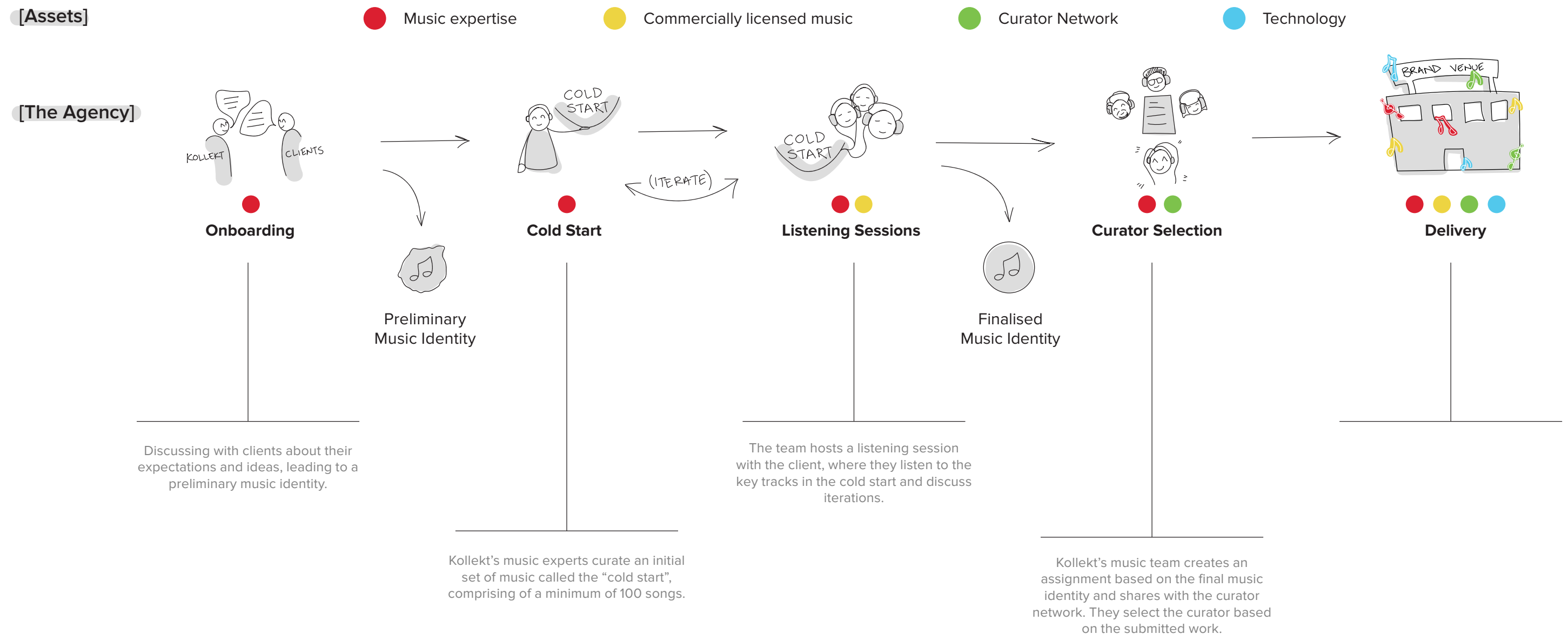
Delivery

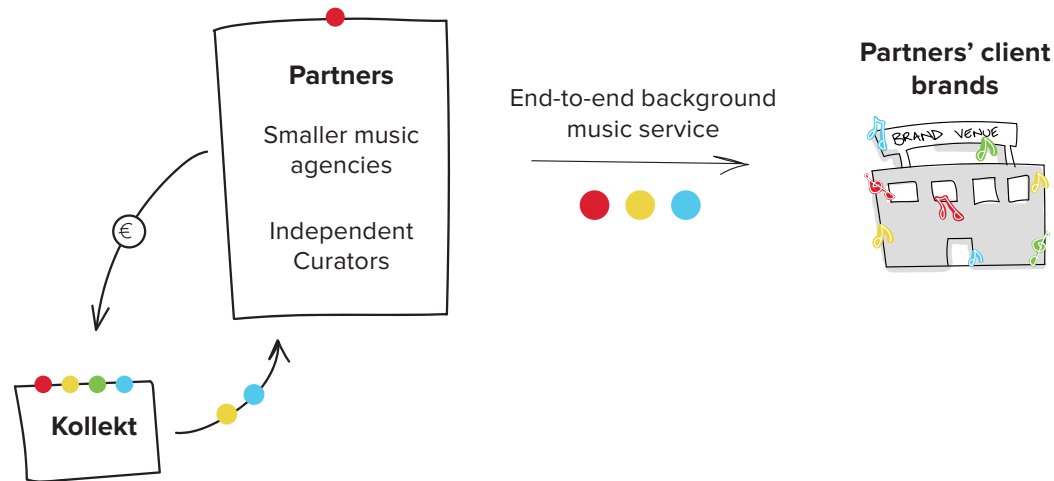Figure 3.1.2 The Agency Proposition & Kollekt's Assets

Figure 3.1.3 The Partner Proposition

The Partner Proposition:
Though the agency proposition works well, the team recently discovered another use-case for their hard assets (technology and licensed music): helping other independent curators (partners) deliver their service. These partners are either individuals or smaller companies providing a similar music curation service to Kollekt but for their own client brands. In this new model, Kollekt offers its products on a subscription basis to these partners to better serve their clients. The products include commercially licensed music, easy Spotify import functionality, scheduler and business tools, and a simple way to get curator-client feedback.

They call this the "Partner Proposition" and have extensively validated it in the last year. The key strengths of this new model are described as follows:
1. The target audience of Kollekt and the partners have little to no overlap and are practically mutually exclusive. This enables them to work in harmony without the risk of competition.
2. The partners and Kollekt inherently provide the same service but to a different audience. Having been doing this for almost a decade, the team at Kollekt has created and iterated its products over time to best serve their clients and curators. For partners operating at a smaller scale, these products are very valuable as it enables them to offer a smoother service to their clients and have a dedicated software to do so.
3. From the insights they got in their validation sessions, the team at Kollekt iterated their products to better serve the partners. For example, partners can create multiple business profiles on their own for different clients and have a central client management platform. Features like these make Kollekt's products even more desirable to partners.

Having been rolled out for the last few months, this second proposition has shown promising growth and scalability, almost at par with the Agency. From the above, it is interesting to see how Kollekt discovered and successfully extracted value from a niche user segment with a high growth potential. For the scope of this project, this also gives insight on Kollekt's innovation process which is discussed in a later section.

Kollekt's Technology Assets:
The partner proposition is a clear indication of how valuable Kollekt's technological assets are. It is partly because of these that the company believes it can expand to new markets with minmal effort, and it is with good reason. The "Atmosphere" product comprises of three main offerings which are usually offered together: Backstage, Atmosphere, and AtmosBox.

Backstage: This is the digital headquarters of the music service. Backstage is where business owners/managers can view all their playlists, schedule playback, and give feedback to curators. This is also the platform curators use to upload new music for the brands. It is a desktop-first web application with a clean and streamlined user experience.

Atmosphere: This is the application businesses use to play music in their venues. It is available on all popular platforms and allows seamless music playback. The controls are simple and limited: the user can view the playlist in the collection (usually 3-5), play and pause the music, and skip the track currently playing.

AtmosBox: Kollet realised that having businesses often lack a dedicated hardware device that can stay present at the venues at all times (which is a pre-requisite for seamless playback). Hence, they launched the AtmosBox, a proprietary hardware device that plugs into the venue's audio system and eliminates the need for any external control device.
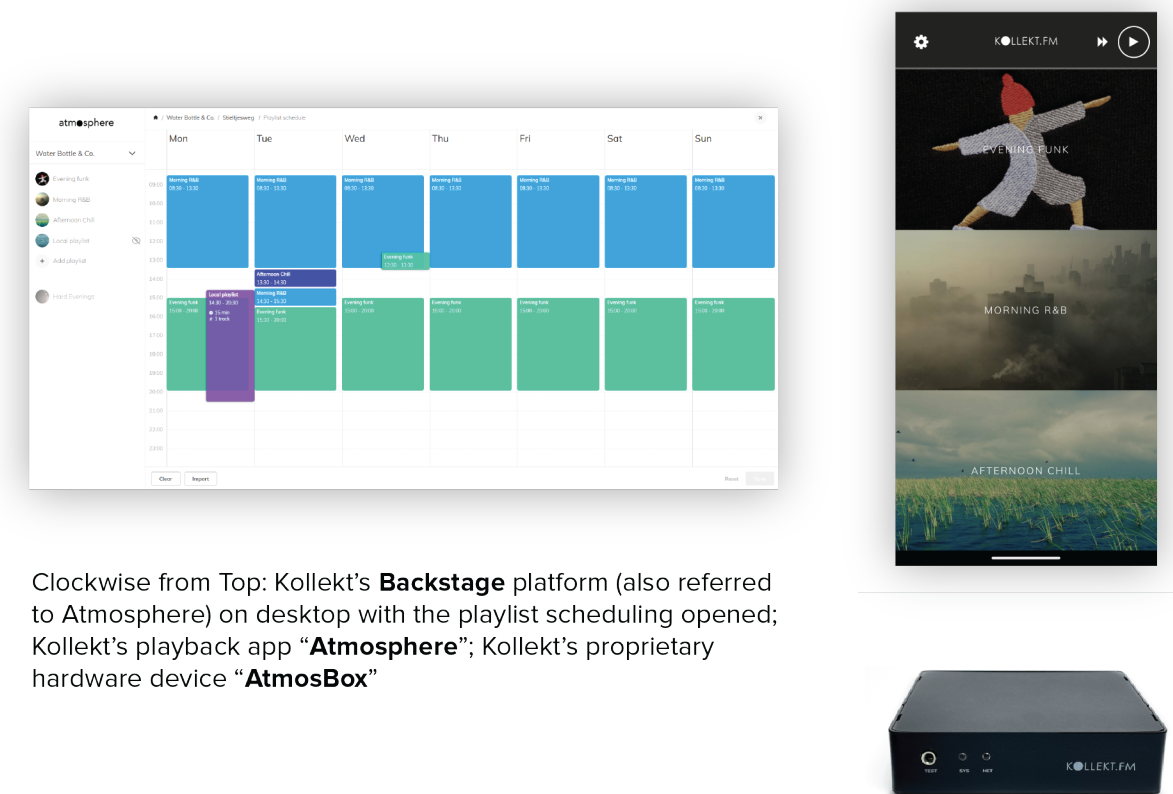
Clockwise from Top: Kollekt's **Backstage** platform (also referred to Atmosphere) on desktop with the playlist scheduling opened; Kollekt's playback app "**Atmosphere**"; Kollekt's proprietary hardware device "**AtmosBox**"

Figure 3.1.4 Kollekt's technological products

The Employee Focussed proposition:
Another new need has been recently identified by the team, with strong evidence from their current clients. Business owners are slowly realising that their employees are a key stakeholder in the background music being played, and this insight can be explored to add value in different use-cases.
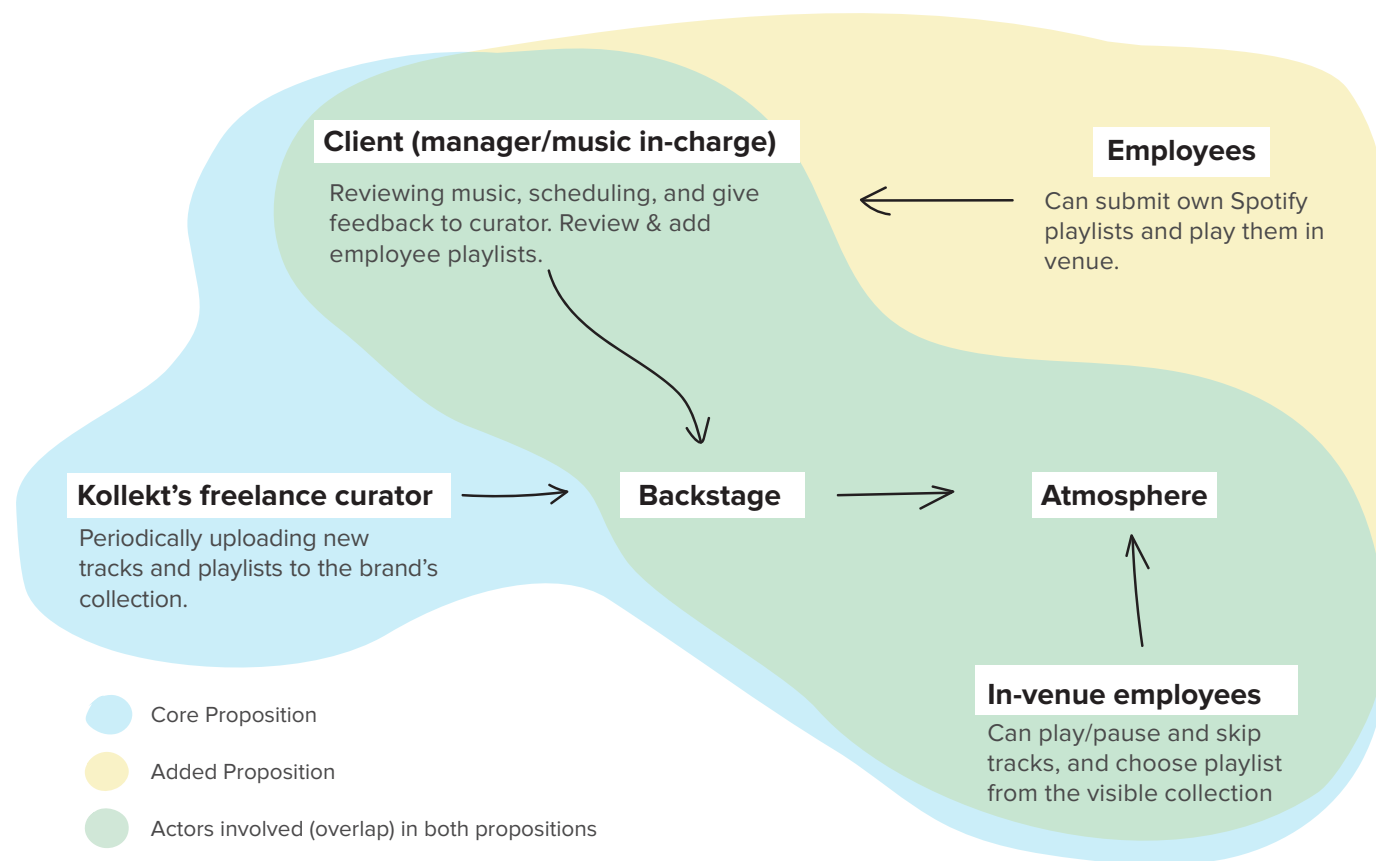

Client (manager/music in-charge)
Reviewing music, scheduling, and give feedback to curator. Review & add employee playlists.

Employees
Can submit own Spotify playlists and play them in venue.

Kollekt's freelance curator
Periodically uploading new tracks and playlists to the brand's collection.

Backstage

Atmosphere

In-venue employees
Can play/pause and skip tracks, and choose playlist from the visible collection

Core Proposition
Added Proposition
Actors involved (overlap) in both propositions

Figure 3.1.5 Kollekt's core and modified proposition for Case 1

Case 1
A current client of Kollekt (a chain of Cafés) strongly believes that their baristas should be able to curate music for the venues they work in. They believe that each of their venues should have a different sound, depending on the people working there. This also shows that they have a lot of trust in their employees and want them to be in-charge of the "vibe". To service this need, Kollekt has modified their proposition and tailored it towards the client company's needs. Employees can now upload their playlists freely through a QR code link in the venues. These playlists go to the headquarters of the client company, where there is a music expert listening to the music and performing quality checks. This step is vital as even though the company wants venues to sound different, they are still a chain of cafes with a strong brand which needs to be adhered to, to an extent. After being approved, the playlists show up on the Atmosphere app for the venues that submitted them, and employees are free to play them whenever they want. This proposition has been live for quite some time and has been working well, with the client company happy and satisfied.

Case 2
Another example of a current client with a similar need is of a fast-food chain primarily focussing on takeaway food. Though they are also looking into staff involvement in background music, the inherent case is quite different from the previous example. The owners have realised that the staff (mostly comprised of young part-time workers) do not care much for the music being played in the venues and bring their own speakers and music. This is undesirable for multiple reasons:
1. The employees turn the venue music down when they play their own music, which means the music that the brand and Kollekt have curated together is not being played anymore. This is a waste of resources (time, effort, money), and indicates that the music is not delivering the value it is supposed to.
2. Now having full control of the music, the employees often play tracks that are not brand aligned and customer focussed, leading to a negative impact on the business. Customers coming in can easily get intimidated or negatively influenced by music they were not expecting (for example, loud heavy metal in a family fast-food chain).
3. As there are a lot of venues, the owners cannot moderate the employee behaviour. Though they have caught them several times, they see this pattern being sustained and are looking for a way to combat this. They recognise that in their venues, the employees have 6-8 hours shifts while the customers only come in for 5-10 minutes to collect their order, and that is why the employees tend to change the music towards their own needs.

This is a very recent development and Kollekt is still in discussions with the clients on how to solve this issue. Though there are many different routes the company can take without involving Kollekt (stricter surveillance, employee monitoring, making their music systems less susceptible to tampering, etc.), they are looking for a solution that can meet the employee's half-way, instead of controlling them.

As evident from these cases, we can derive one key point of contrast in the two examples: The level of trust the owner has within the employees. In the first example, the owners trust their employees completely for their music taste and want to give them a high level of control. In the second one, the owners do not trust their employees in terms of music but want a solution that can meet them half-way. However, a common point is that both cases look for employee involvement, and Kollekt is seeing this direction pop up more and more with other client companies as well.

The Music Curation Process

A key aspect that makes Kollekt special is their expertise and process when it comes to the music curation process. To understand how this happens, I talked with the music team, many of whom also used to be freelance curators before. To me, understanding this process was important as it forms the core of Kollekt's agency proposition. The following is a brief overview of how it takes place:

1. Whenever a new client comes in, the sales team and music team have an onboarding with them to form a preliminary understanding of what the client needs. This includes their brand's identity, personal expectations, tastes, and ideas.
2. The music team then starts creating the first batch of songs that the client will hear, called the "Cold Start". This usually comprises of about 100 tracks from different music territories. Each territory has 10 key tracks, which form the basis of track selection going forward. There are many technical parameters considered here, like the tempo, energy level, vocal/instrument focus, genre, sub-genre, etc.
3. This Cold Start is presented and discussed with the client (with the help of the 10 key tracks), and if they approve, it is taken forward. If not, it is iterated and discussed with the clients again.
4. The music team then forms a list of curators that would fit this brand (according to personal styles and expertise) and reaches out to all of them with an assignment. As mentioned in the previous section, the music team has a deep understanding of the freelancer community and can identify a set of suitable candidates from their database.
5. The curators then make a curation proposal each, and the most suitable curator wins the client. After this is finalized, the curator keeps building on the playlists each month and the music team occasionally performs quality checks to ensures the music being delivered is aligned with the brand identity. The client is also always kept in the loop, with Backstage giving them the opportunity to give feedback on each individual track. Playlists that are delivered to the clients contain at least 500 tracks to avoid repetition. This number gets higher each month, as the curation is developed.

As mentioned before, the curation process is quite similar to that of design and branding agencies as both are inherently iterative and value driven. It is interesting to see how Kollekt's approach seems to be quite design-driven, which again gives insight on their innovation process and mindset which I discuss in a later section.
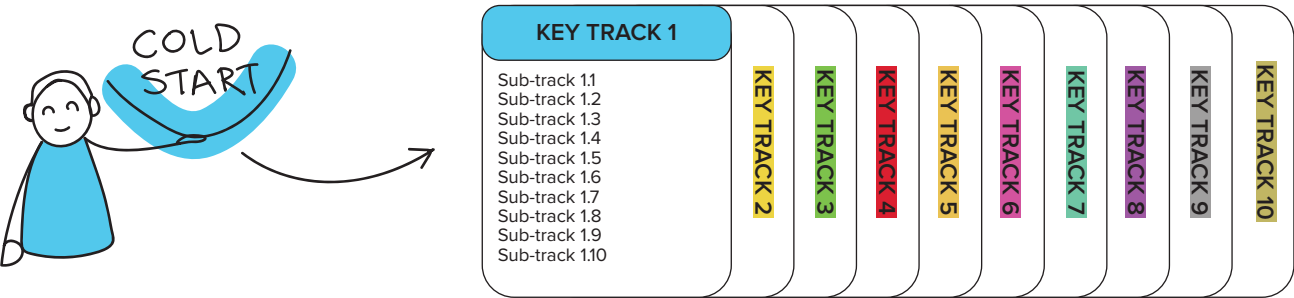

Figure 3.1.6 The Cold Start is a mix of 10 key tracks, with their own sub-tracks

Shared Vision & Points of Conflict

One key aim of the interviews as mentioned before was to discover the team's motivations, expectations, ideas, and visions for this project. I asked everyone for their own individual perspectives, which I later analysed and compared to discover common themes and contrasting elements. Many ideas and visions emerged, and I discovered that there were indeed some common elements for the end solution.

1. Adopting Software-As-A-Service (SaaS): Majority of the team suggested that they envision the final solution as a SaaS product due to the high accessibility and scalability potential of cloud-based models. (Satyanarayana, 2011) The team's current skillset also supports this, as the product team is already well-versed with the technologies needed to develop something like this.
2. Low investment for Kollekt: The agency model is the primary business model and offering of Kollekt, and they want most of their effort to be focussed on that. Due to the small team size, this means that the new proposition needs to be low investment for Kollekt in terms of effort in development and maintenance. They plan to do this by leveraging their current assets as much as possible and keeping the end solution simple and straightforward in terms of building and running.
3. Targeting SME's: Currently Kollekt's target audience is bigger brands, which works well for them because they offer higher revenues. However, the team believes that their current assets can be leveraged to also provide value to smaller brands (1-9 venues). To them, it is a very clear opportunity that can be explored. However, there is a concern that doing so can put the partner proposition at risk, as the target audience could overlap and become a point of conflict.
4. Increasing revenue by quantity instead of quality: The current revenue model of Kollekt relies on long-term contracts with big brands. This ensures client retention and a stable revenue stream for the company. However, these deals take a very long time to finalise. The sales team mentions that sometimes it can take years for a client to sign a contract even after being completely on board, because they need to first wait for the previous contract to end. Because of this, the team wants to create an additional revenue stream by going the opposite way: creating a high number of low-revenue clients.

All combined, the shared vision of the Kollekt team (for the end solution of this project) can be described as follows:

A highly scalable SaaS product which is low investment for Kollekt to build, run, and maintain. It targets the decision makers of small to mid-sized businesses (1-9 venues). The aim is to gain an additional income stream by getting a high number of companies with less venues. This will form the third pillar of Kollekt's services, after the agency and partner proposition.

However, there are also parts where the vision is conflicting. From a developer and product perspective, it makes sense to go with something simpler, but the sales and music teams have ideas that seem to be more complex. There are some team members that believe the essence of Kollekt is its human curation, and it should be taken forward in this solution, and there are some that believe it is not necessary to do so, and the extent of it can be lesser.

To me, this shared vision, and the conflicting elements help with understanding company expectations, which is an important aspect of this project and for me. These insights shape my process further and proved to be vital for the progress of this project.

Company Values, Mindset and Way of Working

From these intakes, a lot of softer aspects of the company also became clearer, like their mindset when it comes to innovation, their inherent values and driving factors, their personal ambitions towards the future of the company, and much more. These insights are useful in this project as they give direction and context towards implementation and integration of the solution within the company.

Kollekt is design-driven and has a human-centred approach:

Kollekt's approach to innovation has been to always first connect with the users to discover needs and pain points, and then develop solutions accordingly. This is evident from how their partner proposition developed, where they saw a need for their tech products and tailored them towards the new user groups. The partner proposition was also extensively researched and validated before launch, where the team talked to several current and potential clients. Their openness to design can also be seen not just from their willingness to collaborate with the TU Delft for the third strategic design graduation project, but also taking the results of the projects further. The company has also always put their users first, and emphasises greatly on their satisfaction, as evident from the way their agency model works (customer service, dedicated account managers, client feedback on Backstage, music team always doing quality checks)

Kollekt has a flat hierarchy and thrives on collaboration:

Being a startup with a small team, the employees at Kollekt are always up to date on each other's work. There is a lot of cross-team collaboration in the form of informal discussions, which greatly increases the speed of decision making and gives quick insights and perspectives. This is evident from my own experiences where sometimes a small conversation over lunch led to quite fruitful insights. The flat hierarchy ensures that everyone's opinion is heard and valued, and everyone is approachable and makes time for each other. This is also the reason there is such a defined shared vision within the company for this project before it's official conception: there have been many informal discussions about this topic and the team has already reached a consensus regarding some elements.

Kollekt likes a low risk and slow (but high) reward strategy:

In all my discussions with the team, I observed that though the team wants growth and innovation, they are also satisfied with their current operations and are not in a hurry to grow. The primary reason for this is that they are already a for-profit company and are not looking for rapid growth potential to raise investment, like early-stage startups usually are. This is evident from the way they have been innovating, all the iterations and changes in their services have been informed by clients and stakeholders, which they first extensively validate before launching. However, the team is very confident in the potential of their assets and technology and believe that they can be leveraged better.

Conclusions 1

From the company intakes and my personal experiences with working with them, I have the following key project-relevant insights:

C1.1 The team is looking for a new low-maintenance income stream through a new value proposition to form their third value pillar. The US market is lucrative due to several reasons, but it is only one of the many ways an income stream can be created. There are also barriers to designing for the US market – the company does not want to set up a physical presence and doing remote research and validation is a high investment task.

C1.2 The team envisions a SaaS product for small to medium enterprises (SMEs) as an end-solution. The exact value-proposition is undefined, but the scalability and accessibility of SaaS combined with the huge market size of SME's make it a desirable angle for the company.

C1.3 The team at Kollekt has recently discovered (through their current client companies) a need of employee involvement in music. The use-cases for this need can be quite different, but business owners are slowly realising that their employees are a key stakeholder in the music and this direction can be explored further.

C1.4 Kollekt is design-driven, collaborative, and values validated solutions. The company is not inherently into high-risk, high-reward strategies and is not looking for urgent growth opportunities.

3.2 THE MARKET

While finding more about the company's propositions, operations, expectations, and values was vital to the project, so was understanding what is currently being offered in the market right now. The first challenge was to narrow down on to who and what could be a competitor to the new proposition, and the conjectures presented in the last section gave insightful direction towards finding the answer to this.

As the company envisioned a SaaS offering targeting SME's with 1-9 venues, I took that as a starting point. My second filter was to primarily consider offerings in the US market, but did not do so very strictly, due to C1.1. Services were found through the internet by using varied search keywords and applying regional filters through virtual private networks (VPNs). Information such as the kind of offerings, clients, pricing, and feature sets were obtained from the services' own websites and communication channels. Professional networking websites like LinkedIn and Glassdoor provided insight on the company size and history, while review services and forums such as Trustpilot, Google Reviews, Reddit, and Quora were utilised to understand customer opinions and popularity of these different services. As the focus was on SaaS offerings, it also became possible to obtain trial versions of some popular competitors to gain a deeper understanding of how their propositions work and function.

In total 19 B2B background music companies were studied, out of which 10 were US-Based. A brief overview can be found in Table 3.2.1. The goal of this phase was to understand current market offerings and find possible gaps or opportunities by following a three-step approach:
1. Researching what is currently being offered, how it is being offered, and to whom.
2. Observing which services are doing well, which are not, and why.
3. Analysing the results, trends, and literature to find any visible opportunities or gaps.

Company Name	Country of Origin	Company Size (Employees)	Notable Clients	Pricing (per month per zone)
Activaire	USA	11 to 50	Pantagonia,WeWork,Hyatt, Hilton,Uniqlo	$35/$50/Enterprise
Soundtrack Your Brand	Sweden	51 to 200	Toni & Guy, Spotify, TAG Heuer, Joe & the Juice, W Hotels, Kone	$35/$55/Enterprise
SoundMachine	USA	11 to 50	La Perla, Louwe, Volcom, malin + goetz	€17,95/24,95/29,95/Enterprise
MoodMedia	Canada	1001 to 5000	Primark, T mobile, Gucci, Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, Toyota	$14.99/$17.49/$19.9/Enterprise
Cloud Cover Music	USA	11 to 50	Burger King, McDonalds,T Mobile,Verizon, Subway, Taco Bell	$17,95/22,90/29,95/Enterprise
SoundSuit	Germany	11 to 50	Nestle, Puma, Porsche, Mercedes Benz, Volkswagen, Lexus	€29 for single venues/Enterprise
Jukeboxy	USA	11 to 50	John Hopkin's Univeristy, Domino's, Starbucks	$24,95/Enterprise
SiriusXM for Business	USA	1001 to 5000	Hilton, GM, Audi, McDonald's, Burger King	$26,95 for software/Hardware separate
RX Music	Canada	51 to 200	Mariott Vacation Club, Cheesecake Factory, Top Golf	Unavailable
Auracle Sound	Germany	2 to 10	Unavailable	Unavailable
Rehegoo	UK	201 to 500	Lego, Primark, NHS, Damiani, North Face	GBP 9.99/19.99/Enterprise
Stingray Business	Canada	201 to 500	Unavailable	Unavailable
Rockbot	USA	51 to 200	Panera Bread, jetBlue, Anytime Fitness, T Mobile	Unavailable
The Music Trust	USA	2 to 10	Nike; mosaic; midtown athletic club	Unavailable
Custom Channels	USA	11 to 50	Unavailable	Unavailable
Tribe of Noise	Netherlands	2 to 10	Unavailable	Unavailable
Overhead.fm	USA	2 to 10	Unavailable	$16.95/$24.95/ $34,95
Bluesound	Canada	201 to 500	Unavailable	Unavailable
Feed.fm	USA	11 to 50	Unavailable	Unavailable

Table 3.2.1 List of market players researched (Source for Company Size: LinkedIn, retrieved April 2023)

Current Offerings and Target Group

Holistically looking at all the services studied, there were some common features and value additions. These included:
1. Commercially licensed music and optional assistance with acquiring additional licenses,
2. Their own digital platforms, available on all major devices including SONOS,
3. Optional own hardware devices (some lease, some sell),
4. Business tools like scheduling, remote playback, and limiting employee access,
5. Collections of premade playlists and the options to mix and customise them,
6. Explicit song filtering.

There were also some additional features that only some services offered, like:
1. Digital onboarding processes with music suggestions,
2. Importing playlists from personal-use applications like Spotify,
3. Remote control applications for employees to limit their access even more,
4. Adding custom messages and announcements between music playback,

It is also interesting to note that most services offered a tier-based subscription pricing model, usually with three tiers. The first tier covers the basic features and seems to target small sized businesses with low music investment, while the second tier offers a more holistic service and seems to target medium sized brands. The third tier usually has high-end music curation with enterprise pricing which works similar to Kollekt's agency model. The second option is also quite often the highlighted one, which could be possibly attributed to the decoy effect. That could also be a possible explanation for the first tier having very limited functionality with a higher price. Figure 3.2.1 is a representation of the kind of feature sets being offered per tier with the average price points, as derived from the data gathered.

Having discussed the features and value being offered, it is also vital to look at them from the customer's perspective and observe what problems are being addressed. It is evident that these services offer much less customisation and brand-tailoring than Kollekt's agency model but focus on giving users an easy way to play commercially legal background music at a cheaper price point. Their business tools like the playlist scheduler, remote playback monitor and control, and import playlist functionality are quite like Kollekt's and provide an edge over personal-use applications like Spotify or Apple Music (which are illegal to use, but small businesses opt for anyway). It is also interesting that most of them provide little to no direction to the users on what to play and give them full flexibility in music choices.

This seems to work on the assumption that business owners already have an idea of what kind of music they want to play, which Kollekt usually finds to be untrue. One interesting point that was present in all the US based services (but not in many of the other ones) was the explicit song filtering, which can be attributed to the cultural and social phenomena in the region. This is interesting to note as Kollekt's current software cannot do this and needs to consider such factors if the solution is to be aimed for the US market.

The target audience of these services is quite broad, ranging from small single-venue businesses to global brands. A lot of the services address different business types like hospitality, salons, restaurants, etc. but provide the same service to all. It is also interesting to see that many of these services have established client bases in specific industries (See Table. 3.2.1), which can be attributed to the Bandwagon effect.

A key observation is that none of the services add value on the employee involvement direction as discovered by Kollekt (C 1.4). The services offered and their marketing solely focusses on the business owners, the music-brand alignment and, in turn, increasing business value. How this could be valuable to this project will be discussed in a later section.

Figure 3.2.1 Average tiers of the market players: Pricing, feature set and needs fulfilled

	TIER 1 (BASIC)	TIER 2 (PREMIUM)	TIER 3 (ENTERPRISE)
Average Pricing	$18 to $35	$30 to $55	Undisclosed
Feature Set	• Limited music collection • Business tools like playback scheduler • Automatic explicit song filter • Ability to mix preset playlists • Basic personalisation options	• Bigger collection & playlist quantity • Playlist import feature from other services • Offline playback • Customising existing stations • Adding in-store messages • Management tools like remote monitoring	• Bespoke music + expert curation • Multi zone creation for multiple venues • Account management + Support
User Needs Fulfilled	• Commercially licensed music • Scheduling and hands-free playback • Filtering explicit songs • Setting a basic music identity	• Setting a more unique music identity • Importing own playlists for commercial use • Managing different venues and limiting staff access	• Completely brand-tailored music and music standardization • Priority customer service

What works, What does not, and Why

In order to find out which services provide the most value to businesses, online forums like Trustpilot, Google reviews, Redditt, and Quora were used. Five services were also tried (via the free trials offered) to explore the offerings in-depth. A comprehensive 2-hour testing session of these services with the Kollekt team was also carried out and insights were drawn.

From the online research, a few services stand out, namely Soundtrack Your Brand, Activaire, SoundMachine, Mood Media and Cloud Cover Music. From their websites and communications, they seem to have the most refined and comprehensive offerings, with positive external reviews and an extensive client base. It is interesting to note that these also have varied company sizes (as shown in Table 3.2.1) with Activaire, SoundMachine, and Cloud Cover Music with 11-50 employees, Soundtrack Your Brand with 50-100 and Mood Media with 1000-1500 employees. (Source: Linkedin, retrieved in April 2023) We were able to test out SoundtrackYourBrand, SoundMachine,Soundsuit, CloudCover Music, and Jukeboxy. Some points about the bigger services in the market.

Soundtrack Your Brand
- Has the biggest collection of music and integrated Spotify support,
- The ability to personalize is very high, and the UX is quite similar to Spotify with the ability to search and choose individual songs and play them on will,
- Has the ability to limit employee access,
- While trying this service, the team felt there was too much independence being given to the users who do not have a good idea on what to do with it. Kollekt has realised over time that business owners need guidance and tips, and often struggle to curate music by themselves.

Soundmachine
- Has a smaller selection of music and preloaded playlists, but a quick and easy setup process that allows users to start playing immediately with no hassle.
- Has the option to import external playlists but through a third-party application, which is a cumbersome process.

Soundsuit
- Works on simplicity and giving a smaller number of music options to the user.
- Has a unique brief business profile setup which suggests what kind of music is best to play for the user.
- The only service with a tier specialised only for single venue businesses.

MoodMedia
- Offers the cheapest plan out of all of these, and that could be attributed to its size and history.
- Large corporation with a big roster of services acquired over time from internet radio to bespoke music. Services like SiriusXM, CloudCover, and Pandora are all (either partly or completely) owned by Mood Media.
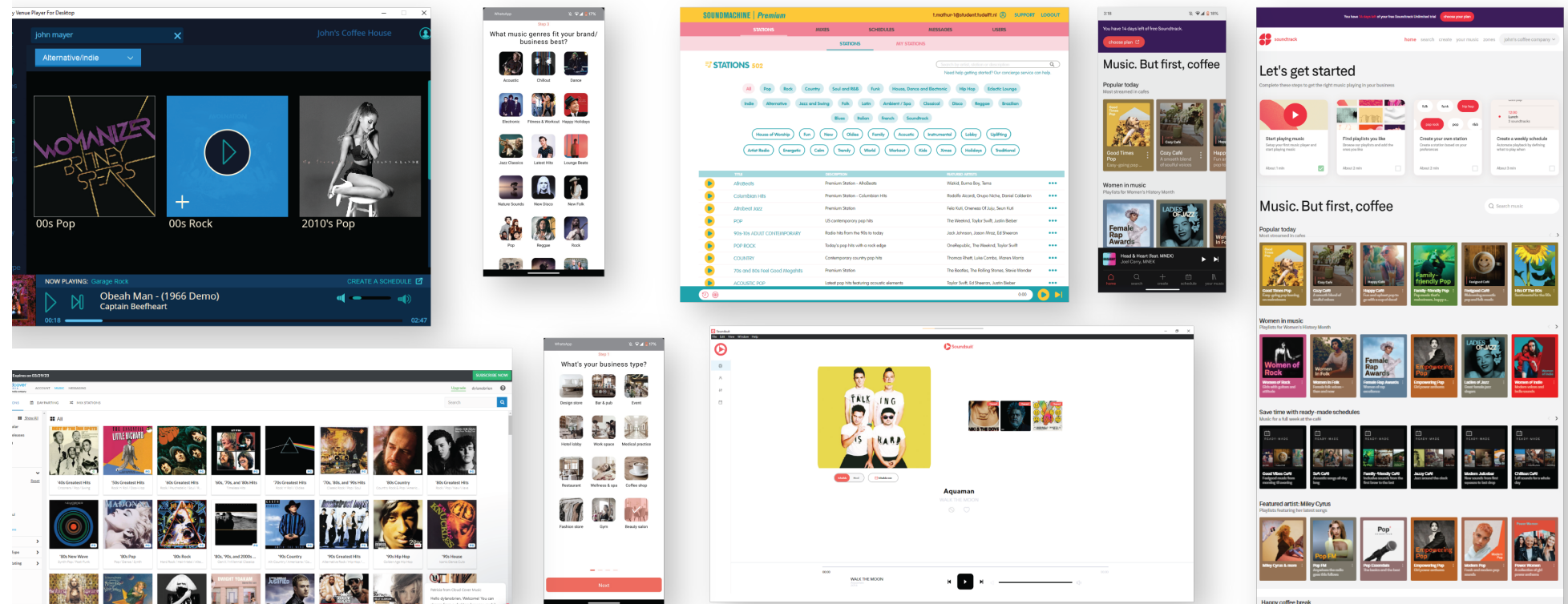

Figure 3.2.2 Screenshots of products offered by competition (Jukeboxy, Soundsuit, Soundmachine, Cloud Cover Music and SoundtrackYourBrand)

In the testing session with the team, some interesting insights came up:

1. Every SaaS service has a do-it-yourself approach to the user experience. They provide the ingredients (in the form of playlists and tracks), tools (business tools and playback app) and sometimes brief instructions, guidance and assistance (business profile setup, pre-made playlists) that the users are supposed to take forward on their own. The team at Kollekt believes this to not be the optimal approach to provide value for business owners, as they are often lost on what to play. In other words, a DIY approach works if the user has an aptitude or interest in the activity, but that is often not the case, which raises a big question about the user experience of these services.

2. Most of these services provide too much independence and control to the users. Apart from a select few, the services do not differentiate between different hierarchy of employees in businesses, which could have negative repercussions. For example, a part-time worker with little to no brand knowledge may take the business' sound in a very different direction, which could drive customers away.

3. It was also observed that the user experience of all the applications tried is quite chaotic. The users are immediately thrown into the wide array of playlists offered, which can be overwhelming. The team appreciated the simplicity offered by Soundsuit, and disliked the extreme independence offered by services like Soundtrack Your Brand, where you can search and add individual songs to your playlists. The team has observed over time that business owners have too much on their plate and are not likely to go into that level of detail (as it requires a lot more time and effort) for their music.

Visible Opportunities and Gaps

From the services studied, it became clear that there is dense competition in the SaaS-based commercial background music services. However, it was also observed that all the services were providing the same inherent values. These values can be summarised in the following points:

1. Legal (Commercial licensing)
2. Music (Ability to choose and play preferred music)
3. Business (Scheduling playback in advance, controlling it remotely)

The level of simplicity, user experience, and approach of each service differ, but the core inherently remains the same. Hence, to find gaps and opportunities in this space, there are two possible approaches - to either find better ways to approach the legal, music and business aspects, or to find new needs and tackle something these services have not yet done.

Competing on a red ocean strategy with well-established market players (the first approach) could be a recipe for disaster. (Kim and Mauborgne, 2005) Examples of some opportunities in this side could be competing on lower prices, better and bigger music collections, better user experiences, and other possible incremental changes to the same core value proposition. In 'The Innovator's Solution,' Christensen & Raynor (2003) recommend avoiding direct competition with established players, as it is difficult to rival companies that have already secured a robust market presence. Instead, they recommend companies to focus on finding new markets where there is less competition or on creating new markets altogether by developing disruptive products or services.

Hence, the second approach was taken: finding new directions that the existing services do not tackle yet. A promising lead was offered in the previous section from Kollekt's current client experiences: employee involvement. None of the studied market players went into that direction and focussed solely on the business owner or manager as their key target user. To gain a deeper understanding of this direction, relevant research was reviewed.

" Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference."

Robert Frost

Staff's relevance in the background music

It can be argued with good reason that staff members who are present in the venues, regardless of the type of business or industry, are the ones exposed most to the background music. Though there is not much a lot of recent research that has extensively studied the time spent by customers in businesses, some studies put the number as low as 4-5 minutes per customer (for example, in fast food or takeout restaurants) to higher than 5 hours (for example, fine dining experiences, shopping malls). (Arndt & Gronmo, 1977; See Level HX, 2021) The staff working in these stores, on the other hand, have an average shift time of 6 to 8 hours. Fig. 3.2.3 shows some examples from the community forum website Reddit where employees of big brands discuss the annoyances with repetitive background music.

The power of staff well-being

A study carried out by Jaden Ganser and Fareen Huda at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse discovered that participants exposed to music with prosocial lyrics and uplifting melodies experienced more positive moods and fewer negative emotions. Conversely, participants subjected to music with antisocial lyrics and irritating sounds exhibited less positive moods and more negative emotions. Essentially, individuals demonstrate a distinct negative reaction when exposed to music conditions that are deemed annoying. (Ganser & Huda, 2010) Research also shows that music is highly subjective, and people can have the same emotion while listening to very different types of music. (Wilkins et al, 2014) Hence, it can be argued that in physical venues, if there is music being played that the staff does not respond positively to, it can lead to a negative mood and emotions, which can in turn negatively affect their interactions with customers and overall job performance. This means a direct negative hit to business performance, and business owners have recently started to realise the power and implications of staff well-being. (Adams, 2019)

Staff and Customer Dynamics

Research also argues that empowering employees as well as giving them opportunity to make decision will increase their motivation and reduce their resistance to organizational changes. (Thomas et al., 1996)
The customer's commitment to a service organization significantly depends on the employees related to the customer. Zeithmal, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996) suggested that higher quality of services creates positive behavioral intentions in customers and affects their loyalty to the organization, which brings positive financial consequences for the company. Therefore, the customer's loyalty to a service company is determined through the employees' behavior towards that customer. In fact, service companies must encourage this behavior. developing the relationship will increase the customer's commitment to the organization, so that they will become the permanent customers (Yoon, & Suh, 2003).

The above research offers theoretical support for the direction pinpointed by Kollekt. It can hence be argued that incorporating staff participation in the background music represents a visible market opportunity and holds significant potential value for businesses, evident in both theoretical and empirical research.
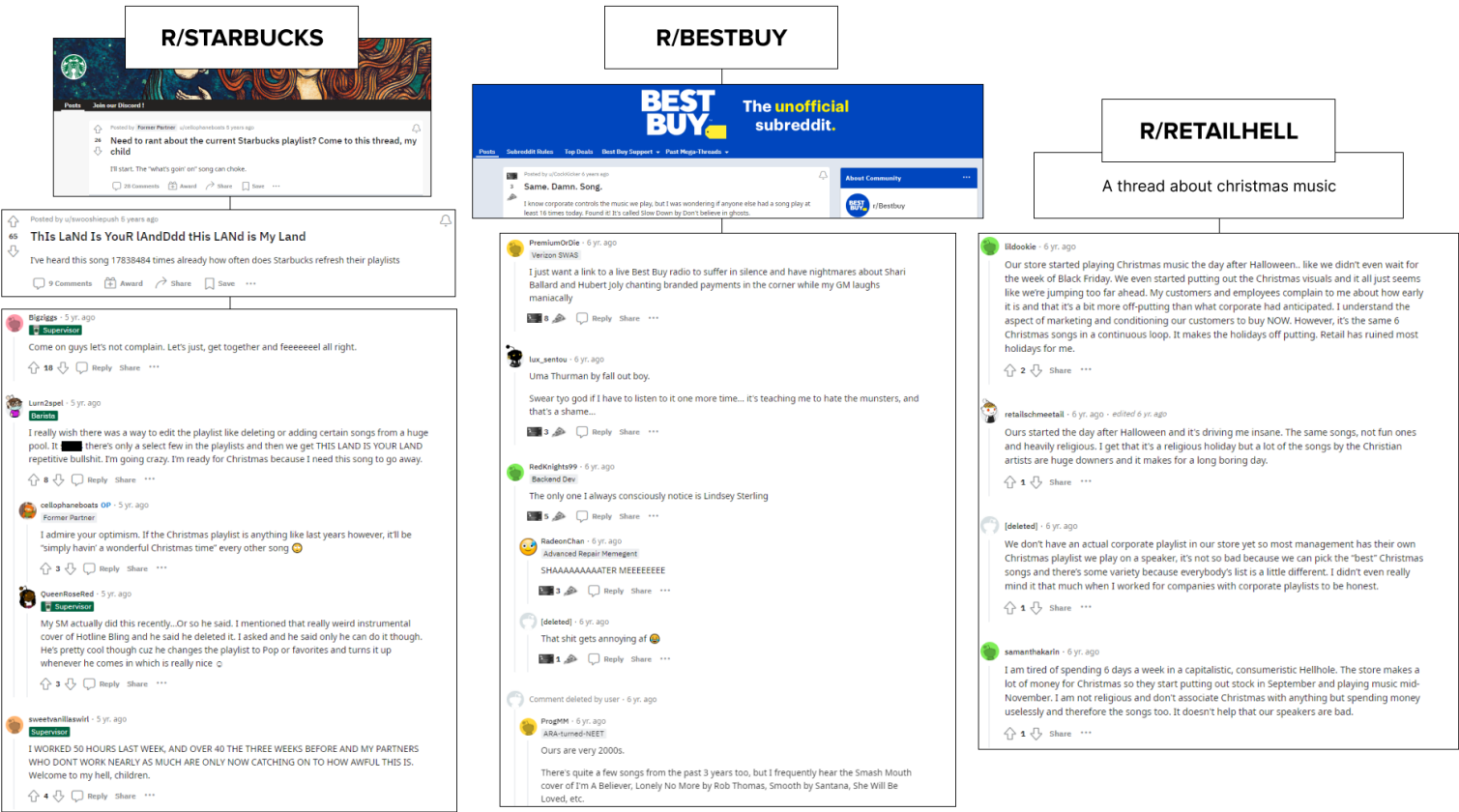

Figure 3.2.3 Screenshots of Reddit threads illustrating staff annoyances

Conclusions 2

From studying the current offerings in the market and looking for visible gaps, the following concluding insights were drawn:

C 2.1 There is dense competition in the SaaS space for B2B background music solutions, with many well established and high funded companies. Most companies have similar features and product offerings, like commercially legal music, pre-made playlists and customization options, and business tools like playback scheduling. Competing directly with these companies with similar offerings would be a red ocean strategy, which is undesirable.

C 2.2 Market offerings for smaller businesses and budgets are limited in functionality and value. In most cases, the mid-range tier is pushed, which may not be affordable for small businesses. Also, small business characteristics like localised music needs, high focus on primary business operations, and stronger staff-owner relations are not taken into account in the lower-tier offerings.

C 2.3 Current market offerings are completely focused on the business owners as the primary stakeholders and target group, who generally focus on brand aligned and customer friendly music. However, the services do not involve the staff in any way, which can result in an unpleasant work environment, give rise to workplace conflicts, and negatively impact business.

3.3 THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Having done an extensive investigation into the company and the market, one key factor yet to be researched was the target audience. This factor is crucial to understand to discover real-world issues and pain points that users face in their current ways of approaching background music. This was approached in two ways: contacting Kollekt's inbound leads and a contextual inquiry into the target group.

Contacting Inbound Leads

Firstly, about 14 US-based and 2 EU-based inbound leads in the company's database were contacted via email. These leads came from different sources (mainly the company website and SONOS contact feature), and comprised of small businesses who had expressed interest in Kollekt's service for their background music needs in the past. As these businesses did not meet the required client size for Kollekt and were not in proximity for the Agency model, the team had chosen not to pursue them as clients. However, for the context of this project, they represented the ideal potential user group: small business owners with a proven need for a background music service, with knowledge of and interest in Kollekt's brand and services.

As mentioned above, they were contacted via email with a brief introduction to the project with a request for a short call. They were also promised a (free or discounted) subscription to the future service in exchange for their participation, to create incentive.

However, this approach did not yield many fruitful responses. There were three responses in total, with two rejecting the offer, and one (a gym-owner in Slovakia) accepting and proceeding with an informal interview. Though no generalisable insights can be derived solely from one interview, in combination with the next approach, it turned out to be quite insightful and added value to the project. The insights will be discussed in the next section.

Contextual Inquiry

Finding Participants
Contextual Inquiry was done in the form of field research in the Netherlands to study a market closer and more accessible with the directions in the above conjectures in mind, and insights were drawn. In total, I talked to employees, business owners and managers of 18 small to medium businesses in various neighbourhoods of Delft, Den Haag and Amsterdam. These businesses varied according to types of service provided (considering a broad selection of businesses to get rich insights) and type of neighbourhoods (For example, high/low income, expat/local communities, etc.), with size as a constant (should not have more than 3 venues). The business size constraint was added keeping C2.2 in mind, with small businesses getting less attention by current market offerings. Additionally, three venues of one of Kollekt's current client were also visited, as they have been exploring employee involvement in music and their insights could prove valuable.

Figure 3.3.1 All set for the field research

Methodology
Before going into the field, a few things were prepared. Firstly, a brief semi-formal interview guide was created. The mode of finding participation and conducting research was of a walk-in format instead of taking prior appointments. The nature of such a process has an inherent time constraint, and hence the questions needed to be clear, concise, and direct. To create incentive and express warmth, chocolates were offered to anyone giving me time to talk (regardless of their participation in the research). A verbal introduction of the exact purpose of the research, its context, and their participation was prepared in advance, and no identifiable personal or business data was recorded.

The questions asked were related to their current way of playing music in the business, their role and approach, and their pain points. As in the case of any semi-formal interview, new questions were asked as the conversation progressed. Additionally, some ideas were created (informed from previous conjectures and research) in the form of mini proposition cards and shown to the participants. The goal behind these was not to validate any ideas, but to get the participants to think beyond their current services and spark new thoughts. After carrying out the field research and analysing the results, some key insights were drawn.

Out of the 18 businesses researched, 15 use Spotify for their background music needs. In the sole interview with inbound leads, a gym owner said he currently uses Spotify and YouTube in his business. Also, another inbound lead that declined participation (a small boutique clothing store in the USA) mentioned that they had switched to Spotify and were happy with the service offered. It is interesting that none of the businesses used the services researched in the previous section, and relied on personal streaming services even though there is high legal risk. When asked why they chose this way of working, participants gave the following reasons:

1. Low price: These services cost significantly less (about one third the price) than equivalent commercial use alternatives.
2. Familiarity: The participants use these services for their personal use and are well-versed with how to operate them. They have a good understanding of the user experience, capabilities, and services offered.
3. Endless Options: The music and playlist options on personal streaming services are near-endless. As of 2020, Spotify had over 70 million songs and it has only been increasing ever since. (Ingham, 2020) Also, the combination of Spotify's editorial playlists and a vast collection of user generated ones give participants significant variety to choose from.
4. They already have it: A key aspect of using personal streaming services is that the participants already have the subscriptions and they do not have to buy additional ones for their business. This reduces costs, but also the time and effort required to find a new service.

The first issue of this practice, however, is the legal side of background music. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Spotify and other personal streaming music services are illegal to play in commercial settings. In the contextual inquiry, it was observed that some businesses are aware of these issues but choose to risk it, and some are just not aware. This has negative repercussions for several stakeholders: the music artists and playlist curators don't get adequate compensation, the business owners run a risk of getting penalised, and the entities handling licensing and permits have more policing to do.

Another drawback is the lack of business-focus in the user's experience. As these services are designed for personal use, the use cases of business owners utilising them for background music in their venues are not catered for, and users need to find creative ways to get over this hurdle. For example, the kind of music businesses usually look for (brand and customer aligned) differs a lot from what individuals look for (their personal taste catering to only themselves). To get over the ever-evolving task of choosing music, most business have about five playlists in their collection that they switch depending on the context. This offers them some variety in music and decreases time spent on song selection, but increases chances of repetition, music fatigue, and having generic music. Another mismatch is the time spent in choosing and playing the music. Personal streaming services offer a lot of choice and require manual playlist/song selection, whereas commercial-use services offer playlist scheduling and easier (stripped-down) playback features.
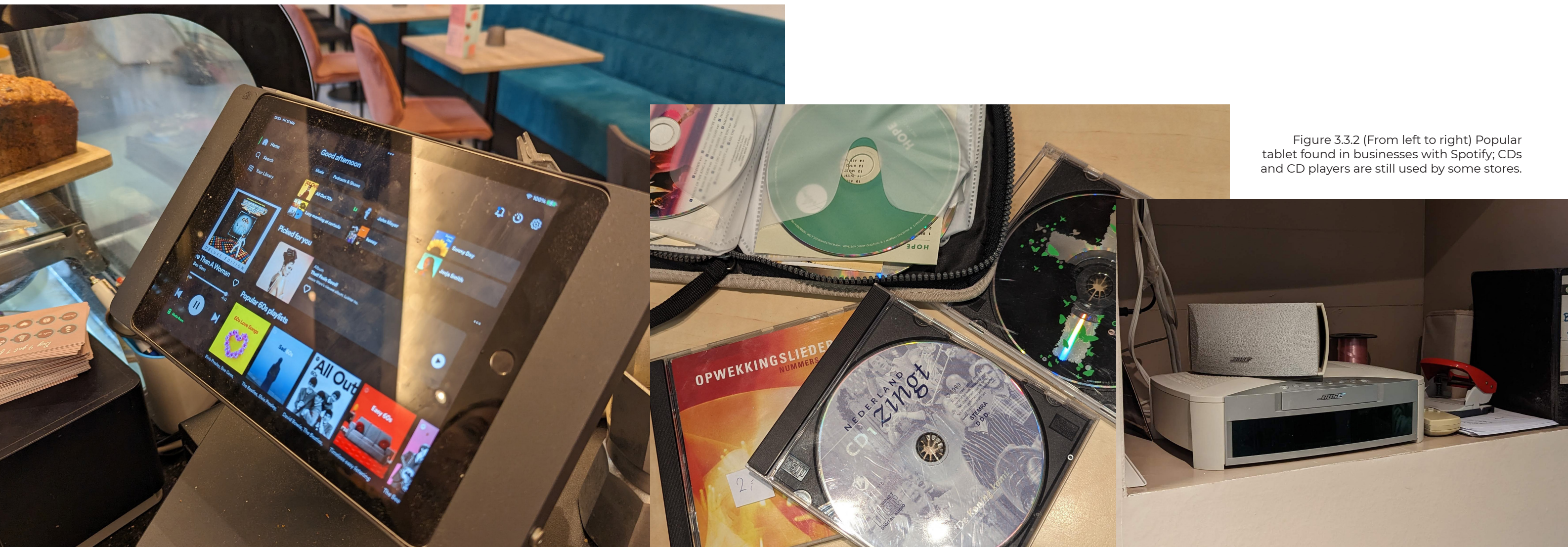

Figure 3.3.2 (From left to right) Popular tablet found in businesses with Spotify; CDs and CD players are still used by some stores.

Figure 3.3.3 Some stores still use analog forms of music, but they are quite rare to find

The role of employees
It is also interesting to note that in 15 out of 18 businesses, employees had control over playback and music selection. It was found that owners or managers often place guidelines and restrictions to ensure the music played is brand and customer centric. These restrictions are usually taken well, but five businesses' employees reported they were annoyed by the constant interference of the owners. Only three businesses had music controlled solely by the owner. Three businesses also reported that they felt lost while deciding what music to play because they do not know what the best kind for them is. Using a service like Spotify was overwhelming to them, as it only gave them more options to choose from.

Visible barriers to staff-involvement
Having talked with several employees, I discovered that many feel insecure about their music taste and do not feel confident enough to suggest music to be played. Conversations with the staff from Kollekt's current client exploring staff-involvement revealed that some employees leave music curation to their other colleagues who have a more music-oriented mindset and are open to sharing their playlists.

Another factor observed was personality types and power dynamics, which also come into play while deciding music playback. In one business, the owner was very clear about not caring for the employees' choices, and another one mentioned that even though five people work at once, only one or two decide the music.

Conclusions 3
From the contextual inquiry and contacting inbound leads, the following conclusions were drawn:

C3.1 Spotify and other personal-use services are highly popular among small businesses for their background music needs. This is because they offer a lower cost, familiarity, and an endless array of music options. However, they pose legal and experiential issues as they are not made for commercial use.

C3.2 Most employees have some autonomy when it comes to choosing and playing the background music in the venues. Owners often put guidelines and restrictions for them, but due to the nature of the services used, cannot monitor what is being played at any given moment.

C3.3 There are some psychological barriers towards employee involvement in the background music, namely personal insecurities regarding music choices, different personality types, and power dynamics in the venues.

3.4 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

There were a lot of valuable insights from studying the company in-depth, exploring the market offerings, and talking with the target audience. Though the research questions raised in the beginning of the chapter have been answered, this section aims to take all the conjectures from the last sections and sort them to make create key themes (called research conclusions or RCs). The goal is that these themes will further inform the ideation phase and fuel the design directions.

RC 1: There is a desire for a new SaaS solution in Kollekt's roster which sets itself apart from the current market offerings.

C2.1 There is dense competition in the SaaS space for B2B background music solutions, with many well established and high funded companies. Most companies have similar features and product offerings, like commercially legal music, pre-made playlists and customization options, and business tools like playback scheduling. Competing directly with these companies with similar offerings would be a red ocean strategy, which is undesirable.

C1.4 Kollekt is design-driven, collaborative, and values validated solutions. The company is not inherently into high-risk, high-reward strategies and is not looking for urgent growth opportunities.

C1.1 The team at Kollekt is looking for a new low-maintenance income stream through a new value proposition to form their third value pillar. The US market is lucrative due to many reasons (the DMCA, already acquired commercial license, the need for only 1 licence), but it is only one of the many ways an income stream can be created.

C1.2 The team envisions a SaaS product for small to medium enterprises (SMEs) as an end-solution. The exact value-proposition is undefined, but the scalability of SaaS combined with the huge market size of SME's make it a desirable angle for the company.

RC 2: Small Businesses are under-served and offer good market opportunity.

C2.2 Market offerings for smaller businesses and budgets are limited in functionality and value. In most cases, the mid-range tier is pushed, which may not be affordable for small businesses. Also, small business characteristics like localised music needs, high focus on primary business operations, and stronger staff-owner relations are not considered in the lower-tier offerings.

C3.1 Spotify and other personal-use services are highly popular among small businesses for their background music needs. This is because they offer a lower cost, familiarity, and an endless array of music options. However, they pose legal and experiential issues as they are not made for commercial use.

RC 3: Staff Involvement in the background music emerges as a desirable direction for Kollekt, which can also be utilised to create a positive work environment and increase business value.

C1.1 The team at Kollekt has recently discovered (through their current client companies) a need of employee involvement in music. The use-cases for this need can be quite different, but business owners are slowly realising that their employees are a key stakeholder in the music and this direction can be explored further.

C2.3 Current market offerings are completely focused on the business owners as the primary stakeholders and target group, who generally focus on brand aligned and customer friendly music. The services do not involve the staff in any way, which can result in an unpleasant work environment, give rise to workplace conflicts, and negatively impact business.

C3.2 Most employees have some autonomy when it comes to choosing and playing the background music in the venues. Owners often put guidelines and restrictions for them, but due to the nature of the services used, cannot monitor what is being played at any given moment.

C3.3 There are some psychological barriers towards employee involvement in the background music, namely personal insecurities regarding music choices, different personality types, and power dynamics in the venues.

4. FOCUS

This mini-chapter aims to condense all the insights and directions found till now and discuss how it may feed into the design phase. The goal is to bring clarity regarding the aim of the project and key opportunities to streamline the upcoming phases and make them easier to understand.

Subsections in this chapter:
1. The Assignment, reframed
2. Key opportunities and gaps

4.1 THE ASSIGNMENT, REFRAMED

In the introduction of this thesis, the project's conception is discussed. The assignment originally began with the goal of discovering opportunities for Kollekt. fm to scale to the USA. However, the research phase revealed insights that caused a pivot from this direction. This can be attributed to two main reasons:

Lack of proximity for research:
Creating a product for a particular market needs user research to be done in that specific context. Though there are many services that have scaled globally without establishing a physical presence in those regions, it proved to be incredibly difficult with the time and resources of this project. From getting research participation, to understanding the breadth of cultural variety in a country as large as the United States, it became clear that in the given time frame this direction will not yield fruitful results.

Dense Competition in SaaS Background music services:
As discussed in the market section of the Research chapter, there is dense market competition filled with well-established and highly funded players in the US market. These players have services comparable to Kollekt's and have the added advantage of close market proximity, established presence and network, and, in several cases, high funding due to bigger parent brands. Hence, it is not recommended for Kollekt to dive into this market without a key differentiating factor or a new value proposition.

Due to these reasons, the company's motivations behind starting this assignment were investigated. The internal analysis revealed that there exists a larger goal behind this one, and that scaling to the US is just one of the possibilities to satisfy it. It was discovered that the team is confident with the products it has built and assets it has acquired and believe that they have much greater potential than currently being utilised for. For this reason, they are looking to expand and create new income streams by utilising these assets. Also, an important aspect to note is that even though these reasons cause a pivot, it does not mean that the new service won't be viable in the US market.

Internal analyses also revealed the company's vision for the final solution, will be used as a frame for the solution phase. To conclude, the reframed design goal of the project can be stated as follows:

"To design a new SaaS solution for Kollekt, leveraging their current assets and expertise, to create a new income stream(s). This solution would ideally be scalable and low investment for Kollekt to develop and maintain."

4.2 KEY DESIGN DIRECTIONS & BOUNDARIES

From understanding the context and the research chapters, many new insights and directions emerged. Informed by the previous chapters, this section aims to condense these and give concrete directions towards ideation. It also aims to create boundaries that stem from the previous phases to help narrow down the solution space to project-relevant outcomes.

Target Audience
Small businesses are under-served and provide good market opportunity. Medium to large businesses that are not keen on high music investment (but have similar needs) also offer viable opportunity. Challenges faced by these actors could possibly be used as pain points for ideation, and their context could offer further design opportunities.

Proposition
Stakeholder involvement is a unique direction currently not offered by current players in the market. Staff involvement is well-grounded in Kollekt's current client experiences, while customer involvement could lead to a better customer experience, and both have the potential to positively impact business value.

Essence
Kollekt's core value of human curation stands out in the current market landscape. Staying true to this in a commercially viable way could become a USP while simultaneously being aligned with the Kollekt brand.

Artifact
As mentioned in the design goal, this service needs to be provided through a SaaS solution. Additionally, the current small business music landscape calls for mobile-first platforms, and users prefer experiences that offer familiarity and ease of use.

5. DESIGN

The aim of this chapter is to build on the directions acquired in the previous phases, and dive into the opportunities and gaps offered by them. Three ideation sessions were carried out with the aim of exploring what the solution space has to offer. These insights provided fuel for an iterative conceptualising phase, which gave way to the framework and key proposition of the final solution.

Being one of the most iterative phases of this project, several feedback loops will be discussed, leading to more robust directions for the final solution. This chapter also takes a more sequential approach to storytelling, and hence the final cycles can be seen as a culmination of all the previous insights. It is also intended that the reader moves from the final cycle to the solution chapter directly. For these reasons, no conclusions are presented.

Subsections in this chapter:
1. Ideation Sessions
2. Conceptualising

5.1 IDEATION SESSIONS

Three brainstorm and cocreation sessions were carried out with peers at the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering. Though each session had a different point of focus, they all shared a common goal: Divergence and Exploration. This section will cover the preparation, design, and key takeaways of these sessions.

Selection criteria & Informed Consent
The participants of the brainstorm sessions consisted of Master students from the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering, TU Delft. The primary reason for this selection was the students' familiarity with the process of creative brainstorming and cocreation sessions, and their affinity towards out-of-the-box and critical thinking. However, to ensure that there was some difference in perspectives, a mix of the three master tracks (Integrated Product Design, Strategic Product Design, and Design for Interaction) was given preference for each session.

Before each session, the participants were requested for their informed consent which consisted of information regarding the duration, tasks, data gathered, research intentions, and voluntary participation. Each session lasted approximately 120 minutes, and utilised creative facilitation methodologies to keep participants engaged, inspired, and open.

The Sessions
As the previous phases had resulted in a quite narrow direction, the first session was an explorative session (with eight participants) aimed towards broadening my general perspective. The other two sessions (with four different participants each) were focussed on one key direction each, aiming to go deeper in it and finding relevant sub-directions, possible off-shoots, and touching on the solution space. The next page provides some key takeaways of these sessions.
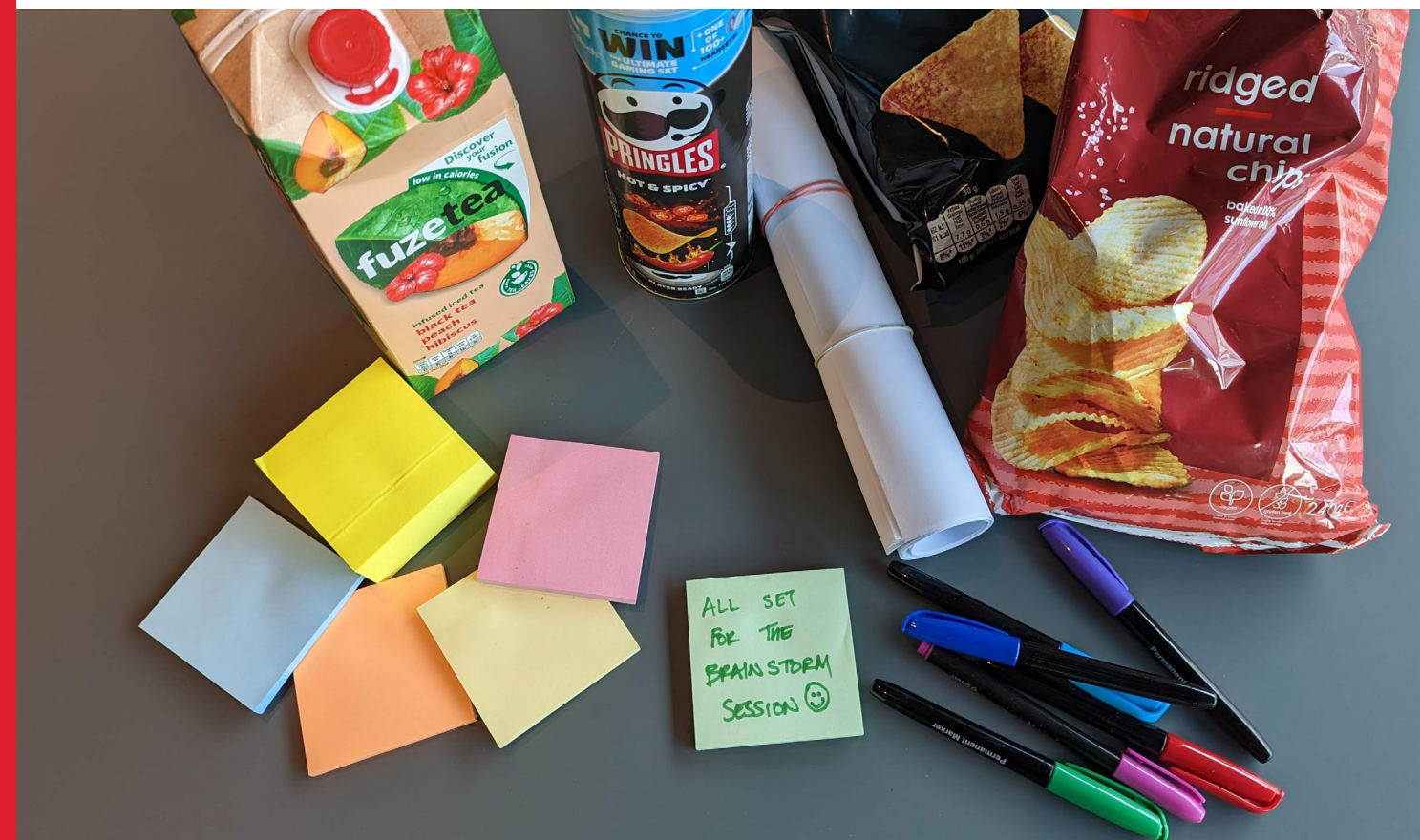
Key Takeaways

- There were several interesting themes identified when it comes to staff involvement, like the feeling of ownership and incentives, the psychological factors like insecurity or power dynamics within the staff, kinds of expertise offered, identity alignment with the brand or customers, and the end-customer's reaction to the music. This also reinforces the theme of psychological factors, which was already brought to light in the field research.
- The staff may bring in a different kind of expertise to the table. For example, a local employee in a fast-food chain may have a better idea of the neighbourhood and the customers than a franchise owner/area manager. This additional knowledge, if translated well, could prove beneficial to businesses.
- Drawbacks of non-expert human curation came to light, like indecent and irrelevant song choices, human errors in curation and management, and brand-music identity mismatch.

- The effects of staff involvement (in the music) on the relationship between staff and customers was discussed. For example, it could add a new topic of conversation and increase customer engagement and interaction. It could also add another dimension to the staff's personality in the eyes of the customer. There were also some interesting ideas about a service enabling staff-customer music cocreation.
- The topic of incentive and ownership was brought up, with both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Apart from simpler concepts like monetary compensation, ideas such as digital journalling to increase accountability, utilising the social value of music curation, and determining metrics that measures staff's investment level were also discussed.
- Issues such as low motivation, low level of involvement and personal investment, and a high focus on their primary jobs were identified as possible barriers for staff involvement. This gave direction towards the amount of user involvement and cognitive load this service may require.

5.2 CONCEPTUALISING

With several exciting and relevant ideas from the ideation sessions, and the boundaries set from the previous phases, I began the conceptualising phase. This was one of the most iterative parts of this project, with constant feedback cycles between me, the Kollekt team, and the supervisory team. This section delves deeper into the conceptualising journey and how some broad and vague ideas evolved into tangible directions for the final solution. In total, three feedback cycles took place with the focus getting more detail-oriented with each cycle.

The First Cycle
The first cycle provided dense feedback on the primary artifact, proposition, and value delivery.

The first concept (codenamed ProjectEcho) was created by condensing all previous insights and design directions into one holistic product/service. This was done by first creating a basic framework of how the service would operate (Mobile native SaaS product) and what it would focus on (human curation, staff involvement, and customer feedback). The next step was designing how each function would work, like BuildingBlocks playlist creation, import playlist function, music scheduling, employee submissions, and customer feedback. As this was a service with multiple users with varying levels of access, the user journey across onboarding and profile creation were also designed.

Figure 5.2.1 ProjectEcho's core values & way of working

User Specific Mobile Native
Different features for staff and managers on the mobile native application.

Playlist Scheduler & Viewer
Managers and staff can schedule playlists easily and on the go.

Spotify Import for everyone
Everyone working in the business can submit playlists. These are reviewed by the manager.

BuildingBlocks and Mixer
Easily mix and edit Kollekt's 100% human curated playlists to create unique music identities!

After presenting this concept to the team at Kollekt, it became evident that though this concept seemed to "check all the boxes" from the insights gathered, there were quite a few points of concern.

Need to explore vertically instead of horizontally.
Initially, the depth of the concept was questioned. The team felt that the previous phases gave rise to rich and interesting insights, which did not make their way into the concept. The concept, though quite functional, at times failed to integrate the softer factors that went into creating such a service. For example, the psychological barriers that prevent staff from being involved in the music was a valuable insight to the team but was not addressed in the concept. It was suggested that instead of delivering all aspects of an end-to-end holistic service, the focus should be narrowed down. This would allow the concept to go deeper into one direction instead of only touching upon many.

What's setting this apart from the others?
There was also a lack of uniqueness as compared to market competition. The core idea behind BuildingBlocks might have been human curation, but the value provided to the user is quite like what SoundtrackYourBrand or other similar services provide. Apart from the staff involvement, the features of the product were quite like the competitor services (scheduler, play point app, mixing playlists), and the team missed the "X" factor.

Don't reinvent the wheel!
There also seemed to be a lot of focus on elements that did not stem from the design direction and research. For example, the BuildingBlocks idea and the ways to customise them seemed like a nice concept, but not relevant to the project's direction and insights. The playlist scheduler also garnered similar feelings, as there is already a scheduler in Kollekt's Backstage platform and the new concept is essentially just a slight modification to it.

This is too much work for us.
Lastly, building an end-to-end service like this from scratch is a lot of development work. From the conception of the brief, it was emphasised that Kollekt wants to utilise its current assets and wants to minimise development and maintenance work. This concept is not aligned with that idea, as it is highly complex and requires high investment (in terms of time, effort, and money) to build.

This feedback has been one of the most crucial aspects of the design phase. It communicated the team's expectations and mindset to me in a what the internal analysis did not and has been vital going further in this project. A study from 2015 about designing scalable digital business models suggests that a business model can only take full advantage of scaling dynamics if all the dimensions of the value creation (in the service) can be operated/translated digitally. (Zhang et al, 2015) This research (and all the prior feedback) suggests that to create a truly great solution, the softer human aspects of the current process will also have to artfully find their place in the digital landscape, rather than only adding features that currently seem plausible. For the next iterations, I condensed my directional changes into two main aspects and worked on both separately.
1. **Making it simple:** Reduce complexity and utilise Kollekt's current assets and infrastructure
2. **Vertical instead of horizontal exploration:** Focussing only on one key direction (staff involvement) and integrating the rich insights gathered.
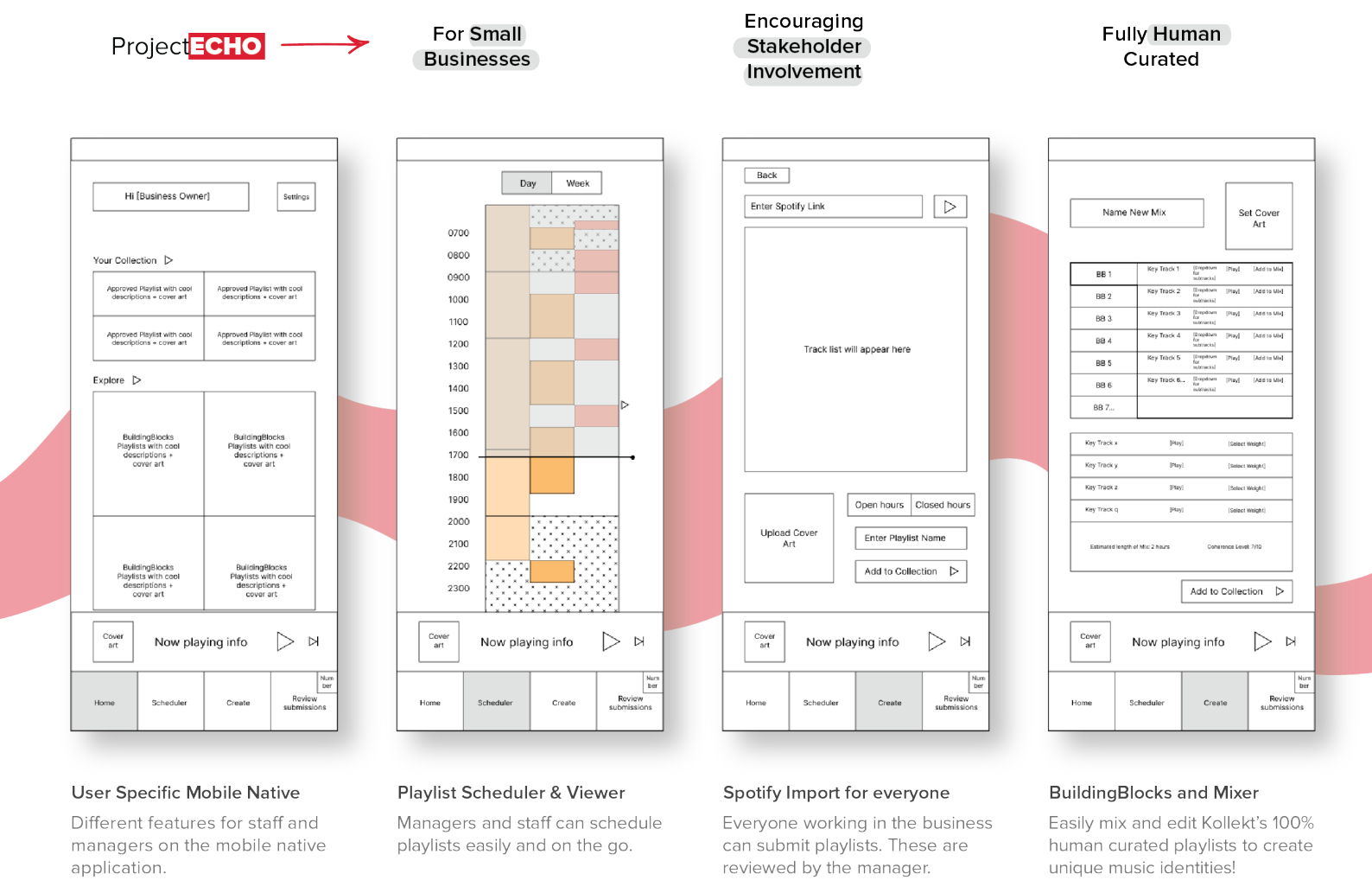
Second Cycle: A new framework

To reduce complexity and utilise Kollekt's current assets and infrastructure, a new framework for the service was designed. Called "ProjectSonic", it involves three touchpoints: one for the staff, one for the managers, and one for the play point at the venue. Two of these touchpoints are already in Kollekt's roster: Backstage for managers and Atmosphere for play points. The third touchpoint is a standalone app where the staff can submit playlists, look at the current collection of the business, and like/dislike the music being played. The target audience was also shifted from only small businesses to businesses that are interested in better leveraging their human capital and feel strongly about music.

This framework was found to be much more aligned with Kollekt's vision and suited to their level of expected investment. It also offered a separate touchpoint I could solely focus on for vertical exploration, while still being integrated into a holistic service.
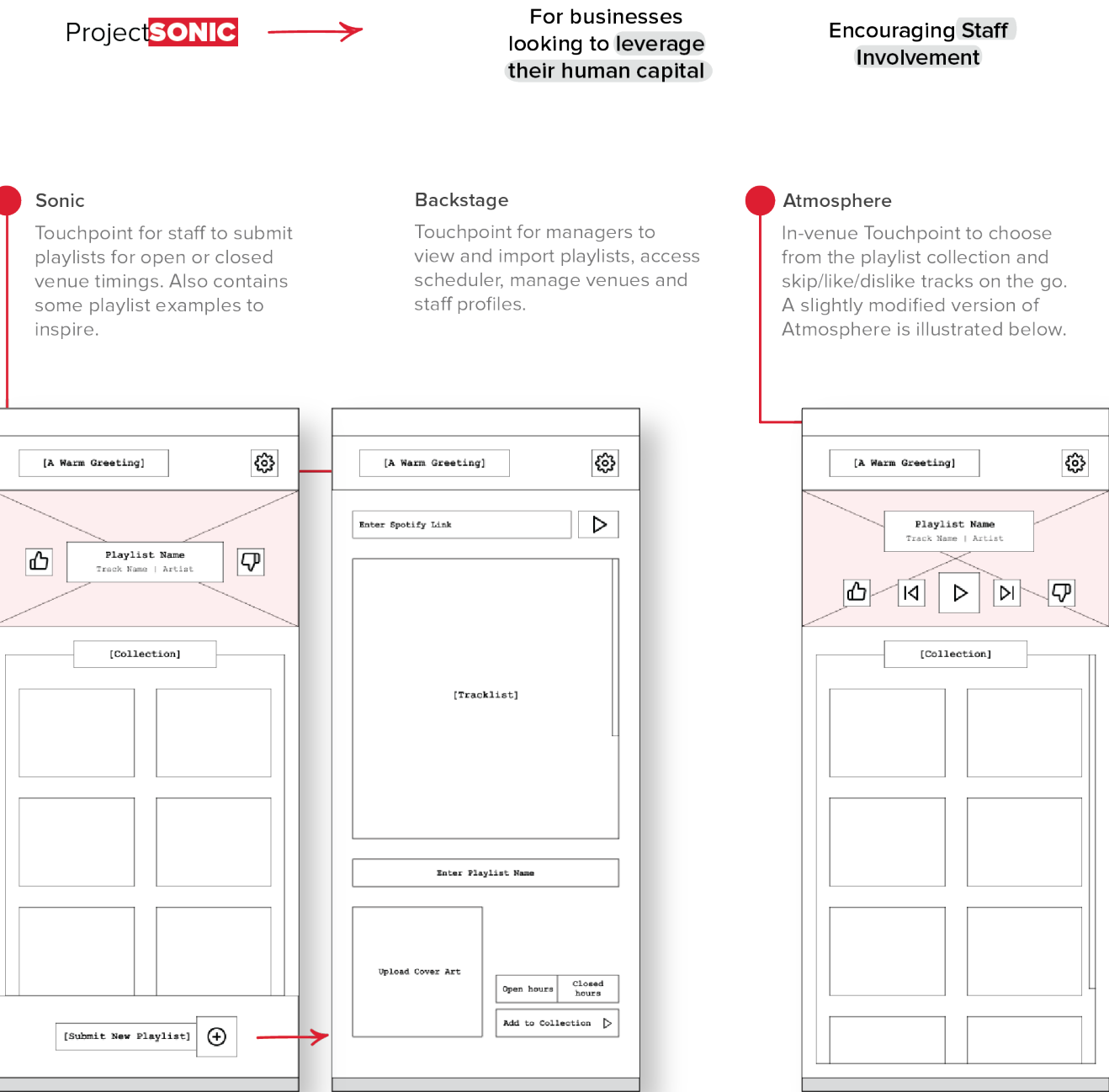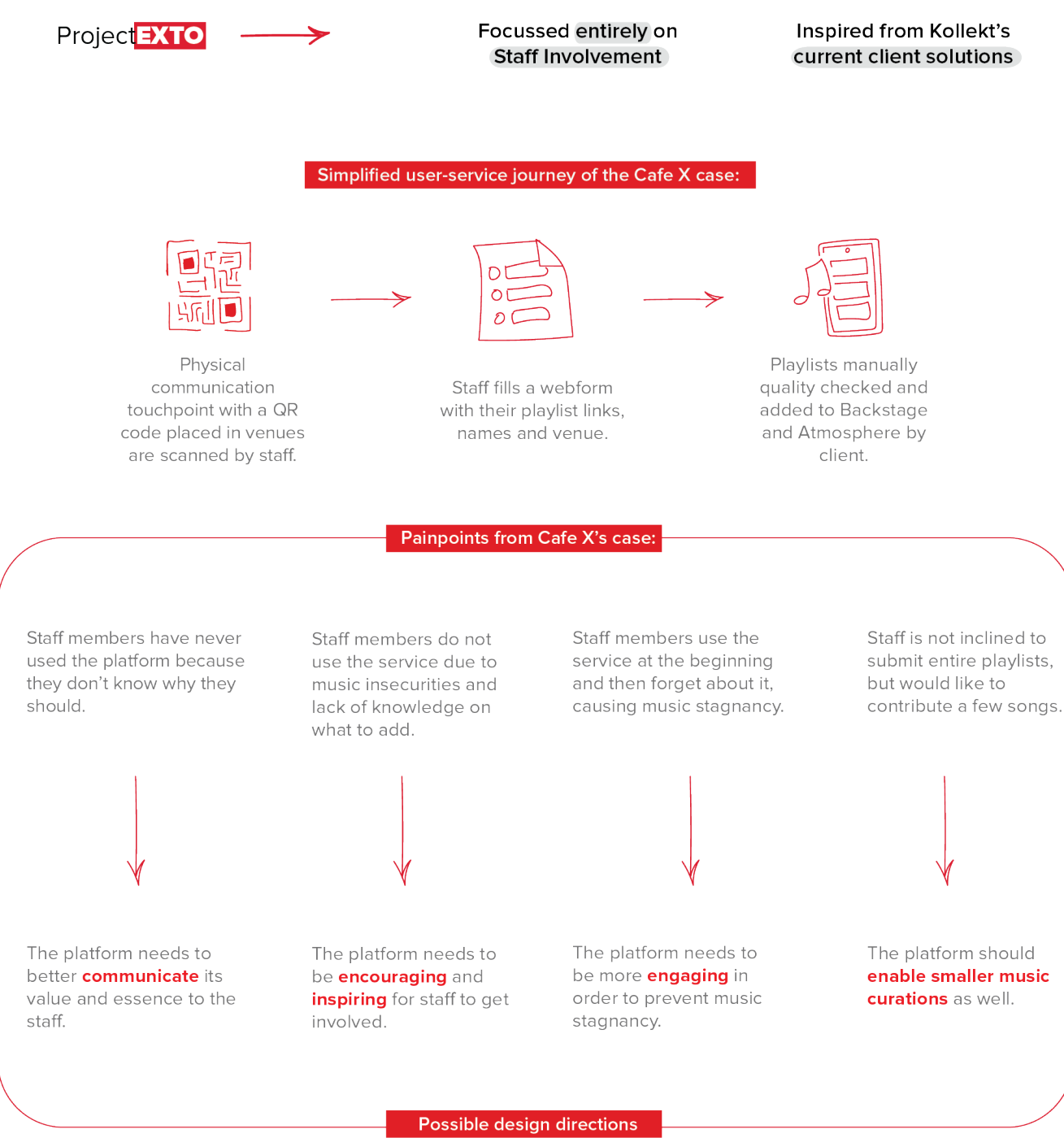
Project**SONIC** ➝ For businesses looking to leverage their human capital — Encouraging Staff Involvement

Sonic
Touchpoint for staff to submit playlists for open or closed venue timings. Also contains some playlist examples to inspire.

Backstage
Touchpoint for managers to view and import playlists, access scheduler, manage venues and staff profiles.

Atmosphere
In-venue Touchpoint to choose from the playlist collection and skip/like/dislike tracks on the go. A slightly modified version of Atmosphere is illustrated below.

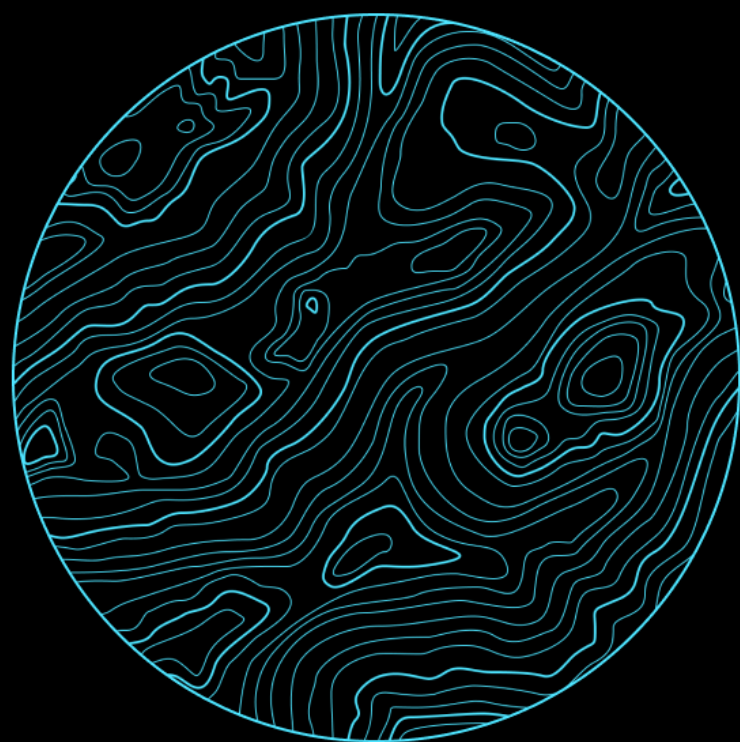Figure 5.2.2 ProjectSonic's resulted in a new desirable framework

Third Cycle: Developing a richer platform

For this cycle (called "ProjectExto"), a different approach was utilised. Instead of creating wireframes and concrete end-to-end solutions, I decided to focus deeply on the direction of staff involvement and how that may take place. A good place to start was Kollekt's current client cases (referred to here as "Cafe X") regarding staff involvement (mentioned in Section 3.1). I studied the services being offered, mapped out the touchpoints, and attempted to integrate my insights within them. This gave rise to many different aspects of the service that were previously left untouched and created a much richer platform. Fig. 5.2.3 illustrates this process and summarises my findings.

The feedback on this iteration was positive and it was decided that the directions stemming from this cycle would make valuable additions to the final solution. Hence, the next iteration became the final one, with a more detailed and tangible form.

Figure 5.2.3 ProjectExto gave rich design directions

Project**EXTO** ➝ Focussed entirely on Staff Involvement — Inspired from Kollekt's current client solutions

Simplified user-service journey of the Cafe X case:

Physical communication touchpoint with a QR code placed in venues are scanned by staff.

Staff fills a webform with their playlist links, names and venue.

Playlists manually quality checked and added to Backstage and Atmosphere by client.

Painpoints from Cafe X's case:

Staff members have never used the platform because they don't know why they should.

Staff members do not use the service due to music insecurities and lack of knowledge on what to add.

Staff members use the service at the beginning and then forget about it, causing music stagnancy.

Staff is not inclined to submit entire playlists, but would like to contribute a few songs.

The platform needs to better **communicate** its value and essence to the staff.

The platform needs to be **encouraging** and **inspiring** for staff to get involved.

The platform needs to be more **engaging** in order to prevent music stagnancy.

The platform should **enable smaller music curations** as well.

Possible design directions

6. THE SOLUTION

This chapter presents and showcases the final solution by discussing its primary value propositions, the designed touchpoints and user journey by illustrating the digital product mock-ups, and finally some use cases to give concrete example of how it adds value.

Subsections in this chapter:
1. Presenting Trune
2. Design
3. Essence
4. Use Cases

Presenting

TRUNE

true + tune

An end-to-end SaaS solution for businesses aiming to make background music more inclusive by recognising and involving the staff as a key stakeholder in the process.

Comprised of different touchpoints, Trune aims to democratise commercial background music and help businesses play music that is more meaningful to the people working there. It does so by changing how businesses approach background music from the ground up: rather than giving all the control to the business owners/managers, the staff now gets the tools to curate music they listen to through digital tools that are meant to inspire, engage and empower. Utilising staff's expertise to curate music also gives rise to a more personal and authentic sound in the workplace, where the music being played has a deeper connection to the people.

Trune is designed to work in harmony with Spotify, with other personal streaming tools also possible at a later stage. It also makes use of Backstage and Atmosphere (Kollekt's proprietary digital products) to provide a full end-to-end service.

6.2 THE DESIGN

The design of Trune's primary touchpoints can be divided into two distinct elements: communication and execution.

Communication Touchpoints
The first step is to tell people about Trune and get them to use it. This is where the communication touchpoints come into play, with attractive colours, convincing and intriguing copywriting, and simple call to actions.

The aim of this touchpoint is twofold: **attract** and **encourage**. From the research phase, it was found that some people have an inherent insecurity regarding music. Music being a quite subjective topic with also a lot of social value, a part of the population finds it hard to share their personal choices due to the fear of rejection or other negative social effects. The communication touchpoints are designed to mitigate this effect. The language used, tone of voice, and visual style reflects positivity, energy, and a safe space. Also, the target context being businesses, the staff is usually busy with work and tending to their primary responsibilities. Hence, these touchpoints are also made to be eye-catching and simple to understand with attractive popping visuals and minimal text.

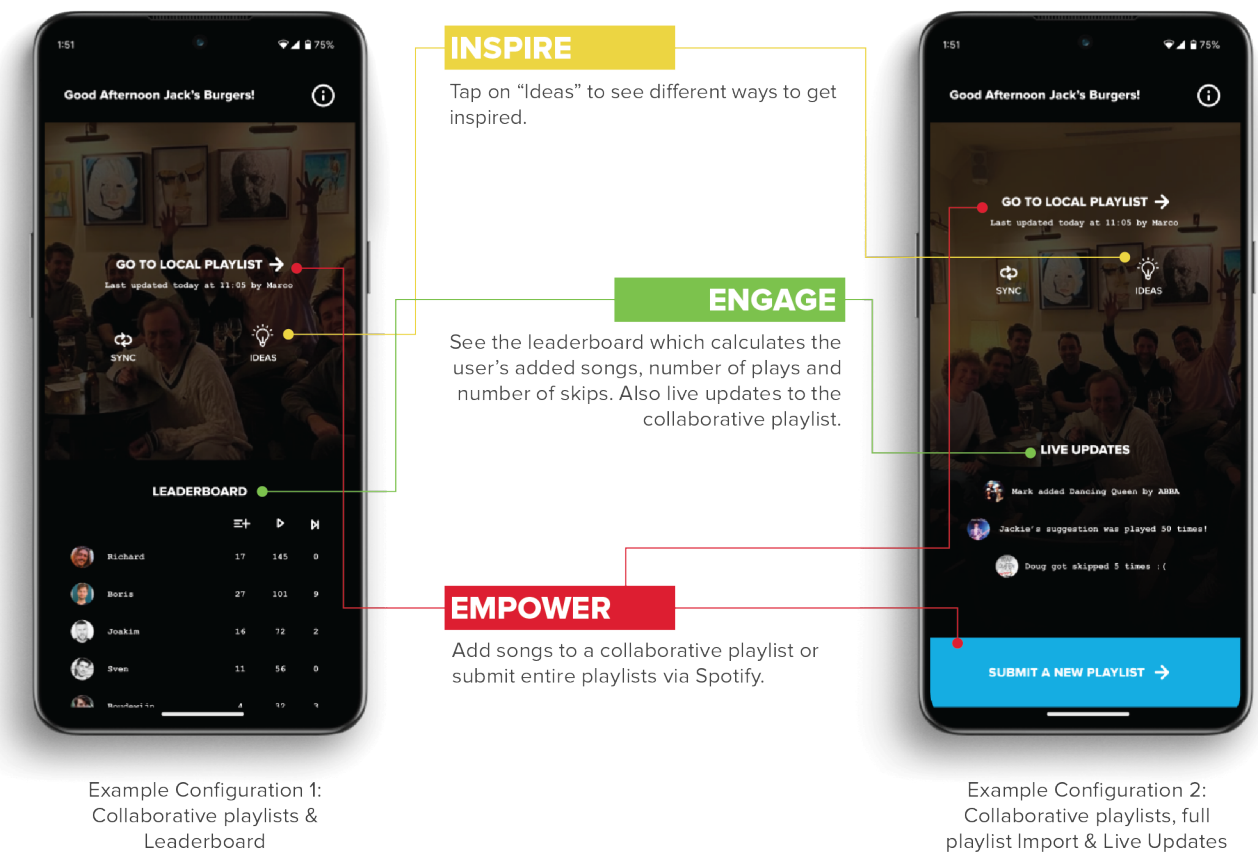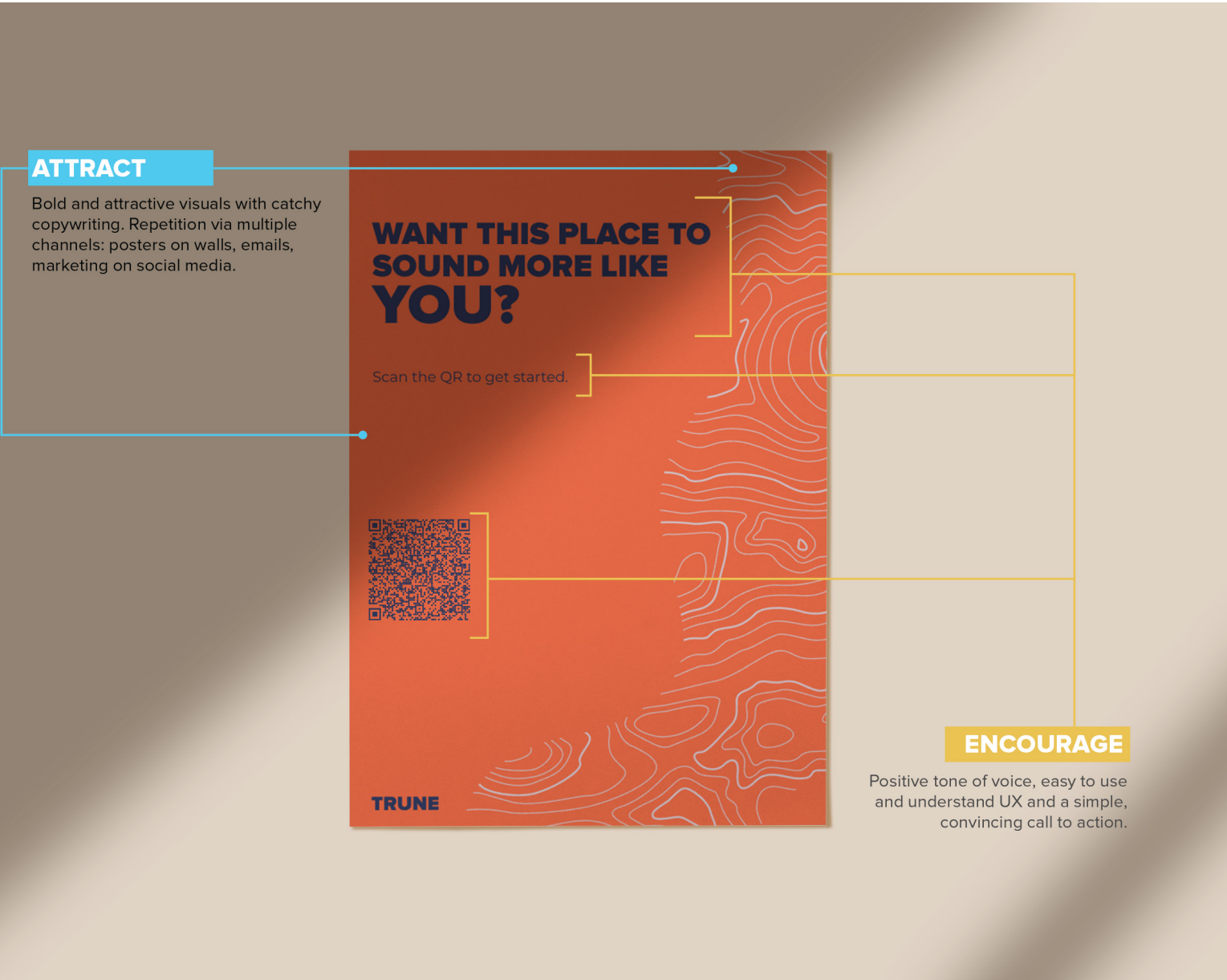Figure 6.2.1 The communication touchpoint's goals give rise to design considerations

ATTRACT
Bold and attractive visuals with catchy copywriting. Repetition via multiple channels: posters on walls, emails, marketing on social media.

WANT THIS PLACE TO SOUND MORE LIKE YOU?

Scan the QR to get started.

TRUNE

ENCOURAGE
Positive tone of voice, easy to use and understand UX and a simple, convincing call to action.

INSPIRE
Tap on "Ideas" to see different ways to get inspired.

ENGAGE
See the leaderboard which calculates the user's added songs, number of plays and number of skips. Also live updates to the collaborative playlist.

EMPOWER
Add songs to a collaborative playlist or submit entire playlists via Spotify.

Example Configuration 1:
Collaborative playlists & Leaderboard

Example Configuration 2:
Collaborative playlists, full playlist Import & Live Updates

Figure 6.2.2 The goals of the execution touchpoints

Execution Touchpoints
The next step is to do the magic that Trune promises. This is done with the help of a digital mobile-first web app that the users (which includes anyone working in the businesses) are given complete access to. The app has several different features which are based on the identified user needs and Kollekt's development capabilities. These touchpoints have been created with three goals in mind: **inspire**, **engage**, and **empower**.

From the previous phases, I found that the layman often struggles with curating music, especially for an audience. The inspire touchpoint aims to mitigate this by making it all about the user. The focus is shifted from curating music for others to curating for yourself, and adding music that means something to you. There are several different tools provided which can serve as inspiration and support the user in their process. All the song suggestions go into a collaborative playlist filled with all user suggestions, so the end result is a curation full of music that means something to each user.

A key issue of commercial business music right now is stagnancy in music, which means that the curations need to be refreshed occasionally. For this reason, Trune focusses on user engagement. The aim is to provide users with just enough stimuli for them to come back occasionally. Too much engagement could work negatively, as additional distractions for staff is undesirable to businesses. The engagement tools include a leaderboard with user stats, and recent updates to the playlists. The final issue Trune targets is the lack of control the staff has on the music. Current market offerings provide full control to the business owners/managers. They solely oversee the music with no feedback opportunity for the people working in the venue. The empower touchpoint changes that: anyone working in the business can now add songs to the music being played. This can be done in two ways: submitting songs to one common collaborative playlist or importing entire standalone playlists.
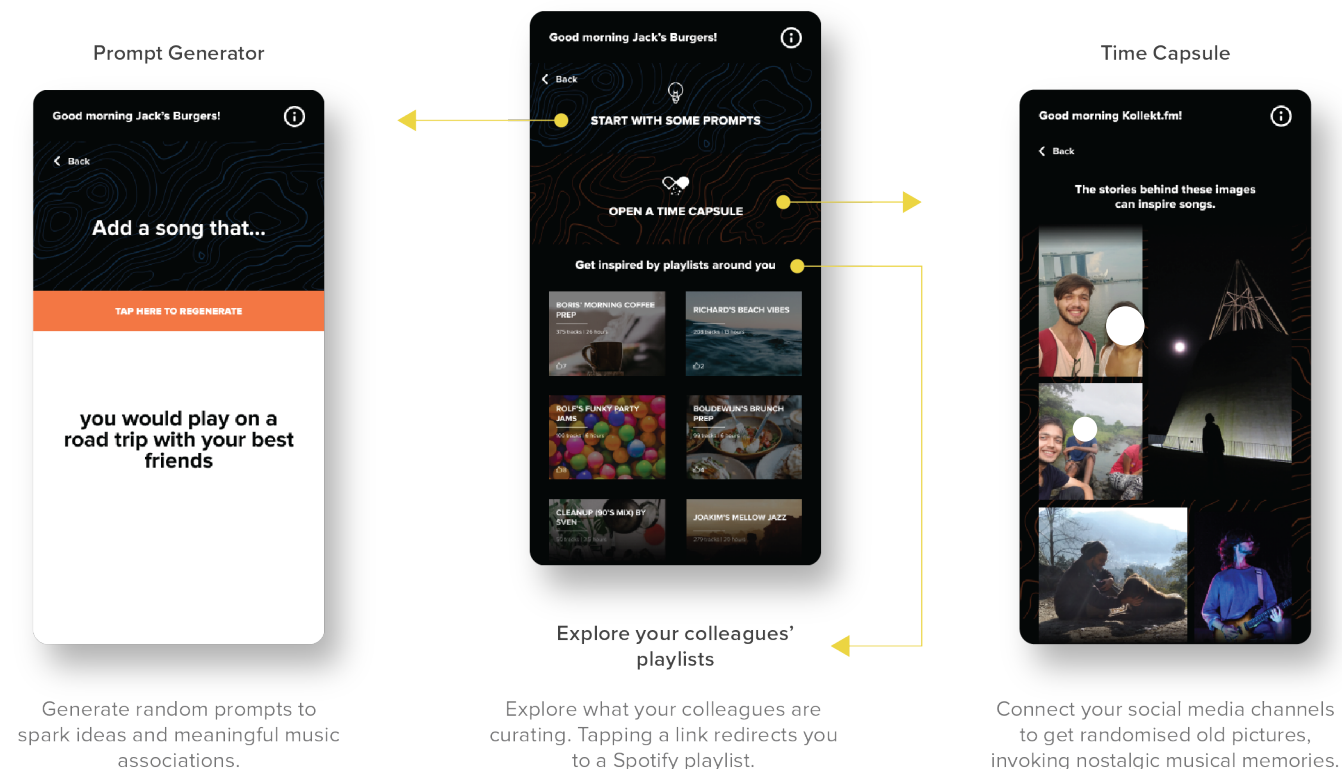
The Inspire Touchpoint

Prompt Generator

Time Capsule

Generate random prompts to spark ideas and meaningful music associations.

Explore what your colleagues are curating. Tapping a link redirects you to a Spotify playlist.

Connect your social media channels to get randomised old pictures, invoking nostalgic musical memories.

Explore your colleagues' playlists

Figure 6.2.3 The Inspire Touchpoint

The Empower Touchpoints

Venue's Collaborative Spotify Playlist

Creating new playlists via Spotify import

Employees can add music to a shared playlist, which can be mixed-in with other brand-focussed playlists. For example, one employee suggestion would play every 15 minutes.

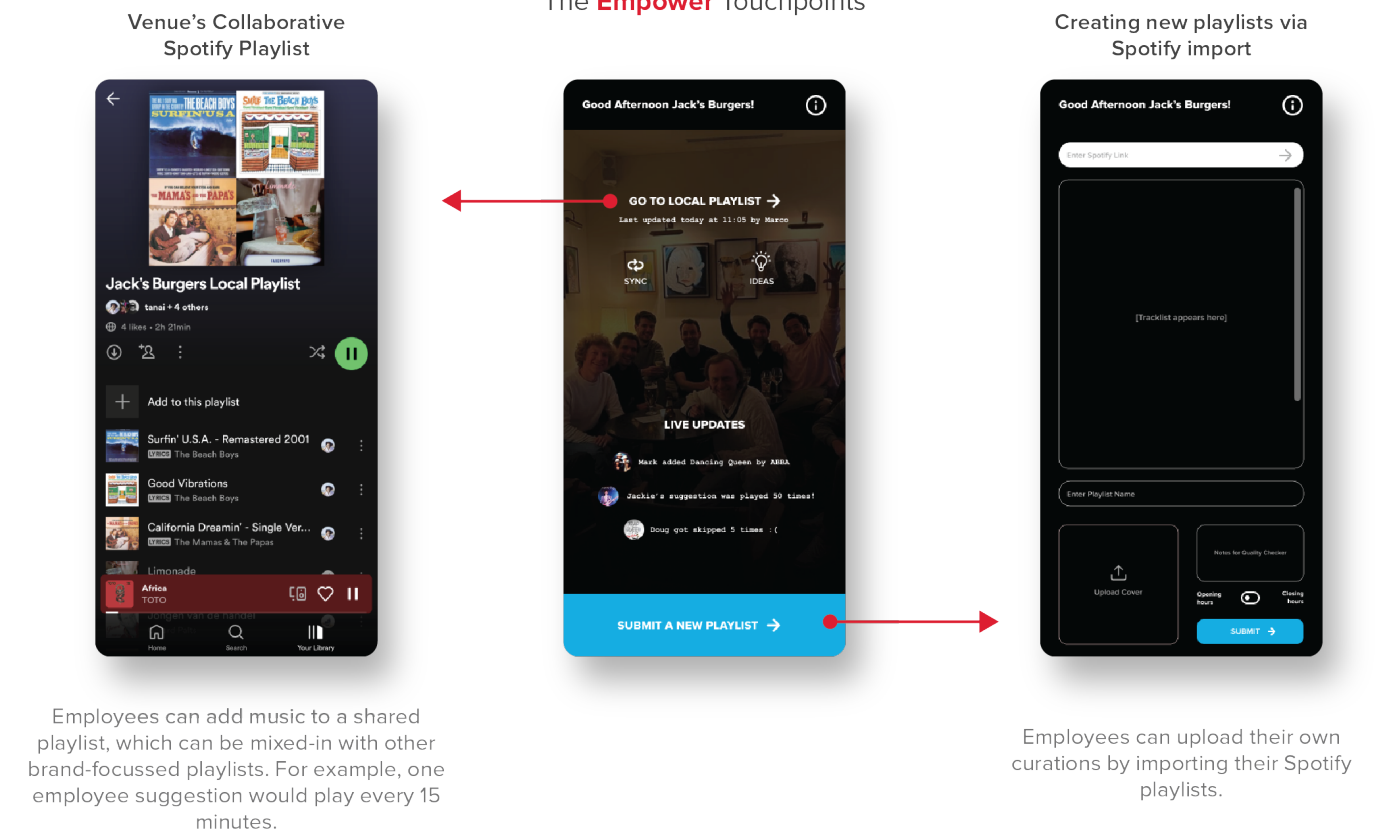Employees can upload their own curations by importing their Spotify playlists.

Figure 6.2.4 The Empower Touchpoint

User Journey

It is important to note that Trune is a completely voluntary platform for employees. Managers and business owners can set up music via the service without any help from the other employees by importing their own playlists. This way, only the employees who want to curate and suggest music will do so, and there is no external pressure on anyone to participate.

To minimise this pressure further, the user journey of Trune is kept highly self-exploratory. Fig X highlights a simplified user journey of the entire service from the employee and manager perspectives, but the journey on the Trune touchpoint is not meant to be a linear one. One can look for prompts, look at their colleague's playlists on Spotify, possible see some of their own music on Spotify, or they may come back and go to another section of the inspire touchpoint.

The standard way of working in Trune can be explained as follows:
The user sees the communication touchpoints > they scan the QR code > Visit Trune and add songs or playlists > the results get synced and appear on Backstage and Atmosphere > the employees can freely play their music and managers can easily review the curations.
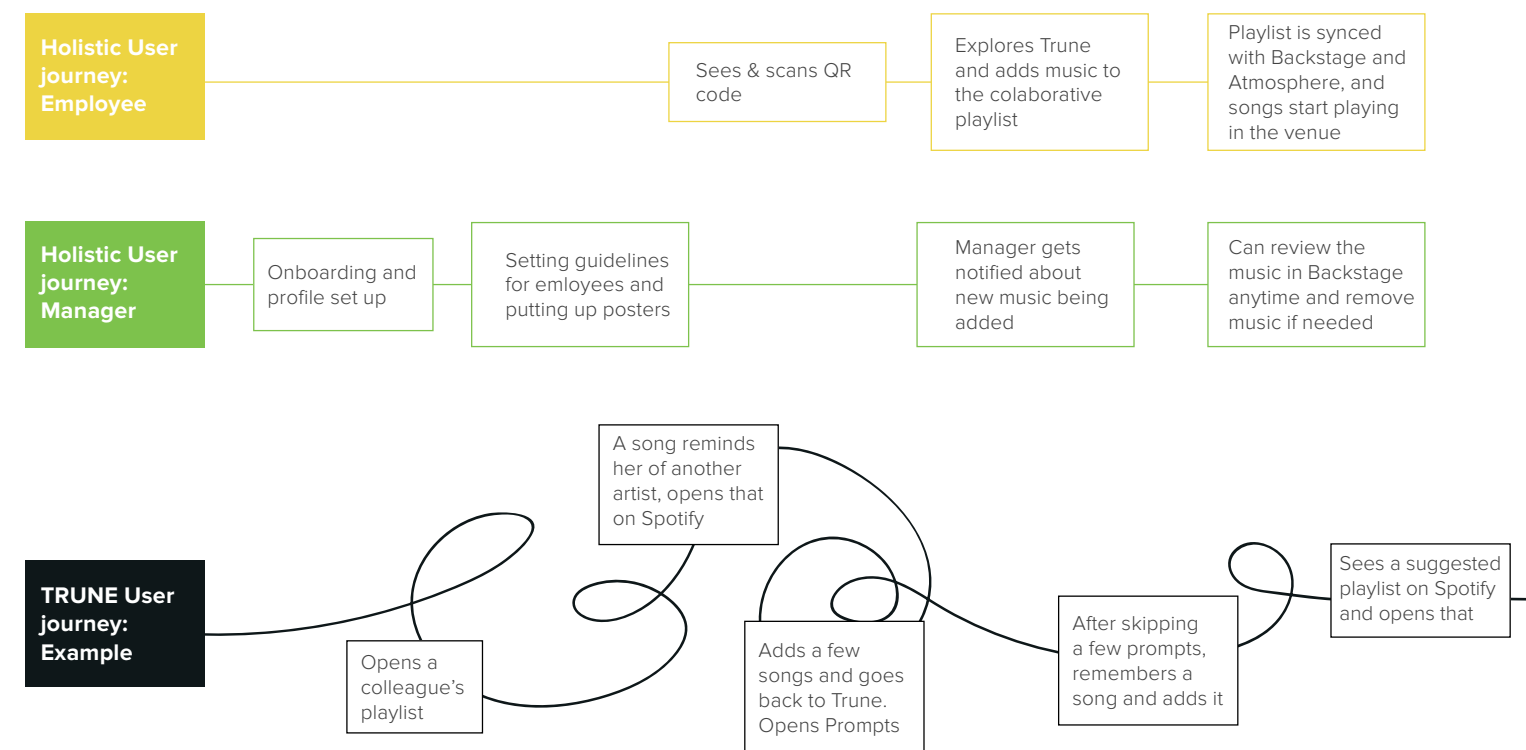

Figure 6.2.5 Illustrated User Journeys

Figure 6.2.6 Guidelines encourage relevant music

Rules and Boundaries
The design of Trune is inherently self-exploratory, and the employees are completely free to add music they want. In a business context, this raises some questions regarding possible misuse, team dynamics, and brand alignment. For this reason, several boundaries have been created to make the service more robust.

Regarding quality assurance
With Trune, employees get the power to play what they want to hear in their workplace. But with this great power comes great responsibility, and there are several ways in which this service can be misused. Firstly, due to the high subjectivity of music choices, employees can have a personal taste which strays too far from the brand they work at. This could potentially cause a conflict with the brand identity, negatively impacting the business. To mitigate this, the business owner or managers can create a set of guidelines to ensure the quality of music. These guidelines will always be present in the web app in the top right corner, and uploading music that does not adhere to them can easily be removed.

Regarding mismatch in employee participation
Employees could also, to make it easier for themselves, add music in bulk (for example importing a playlist with 500 songs). Though this brings in a high quantity of music, it could bias the system into favouring the choices of one employee over others. Hence, there will be a limit over the number of songs each employee can upload which will depend on the number of employees in the venue. For example, if a venue with 10 employees gets sixty songs per week (sixty songs is approximately four hours of playtime), it will result in 40 hours of fully staff-chosen music.
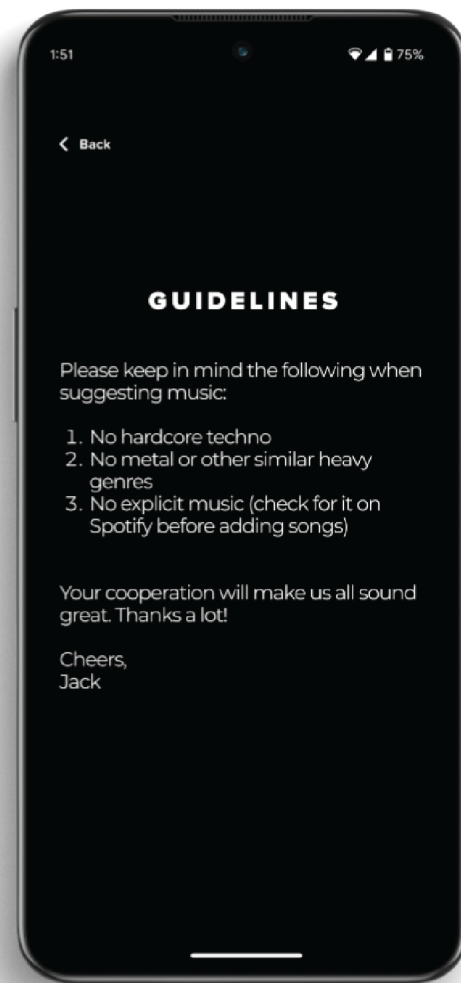
Regarding brand alignment
Coming to the playback, it is important to also consider brand alignment from a holistic perspective. Though it is valuable to have an inclusive music ecosystem, it cannot be ignored that different businesses have different needs and priorities. Assuming all the music the staff selects is not brand-aligned (which is an extreme scenario), businesses should be able to choose the ratio of brand to staff centric music. For example, businesses where customers spend a long time (like beauty salons, spas) may want their music to be more reflective of their brand/service and focus more on brand centric music. Businesses where customers spend less time and staff are the primary music listeners (like takeaway restaurants, kitchens) may want to have more staff centric music to keep their staff happier. The first step Trune takes to mitigate this is the choice of collaborative and individual playlists. Collaborative playlists provide one common staff-created curation that can be mixed-in with brand aligned music chosen by the business owners or managers. An example of mixing-in would be having 1 song from the staff playlists play every 10 minutes, and the brand centric playlist plays for the rest of the time. Independent playlists give staff full control of what is being played throughout, and can be scheduled one after the other to keep all the music staff-curated. The choice to have these two are given to the managers when setting up the account for the first time, as it is a vital aspect of their business DNA.
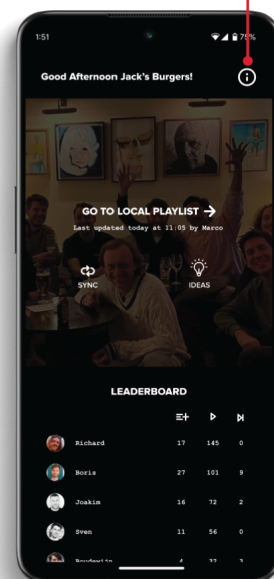
6.3 ESSENCE

Democracy, not a dictatorship
Trune focuses on including everyone working at the business in the creation process. Unlike current market offerings that place the managers on the top and give them all the work, Trune has a democratic model where everyone is equally involved in the creation process. The managers still have some exclusive powers to prevent misuse and chaos in the service like removing songs that do not adhere to the guidelines, choosing the ratio of brand and staff centricity in the music, and scheduling playlists in advance.

All about the little things
Trune attempts to utilise staff's expertise and experiences to curate music, creating a more personal and authentic sound. It also has the power to build on staff's inter-relations having music with stories behind them, and also has the potential to integrate engaging social features in the future. The "engage" touchpoints are all about personal connection: the leaderboard inspires playful competition and the live updates give talking points for friendly banter- "Dave! Just saw you got skipped 5 times! Why do you like that song so much?".

A new pricing model
Current market offerings only allow one user per plan to curate the music. Trune allows multiple people to curate in a single account (priced per play point), which means more people can engage with the music for the same price.

Crowdsourcing, Human Capital & Business Value
From a business perspective, Trune makes use of the employees already present to add additional value. It does so by utilising the principles of crowdsourcing, which is a practice of turning to a body of people to obtain needed knowledge, carry out specific tasks, and involve online communities in solving problems. (Howe, 2008 and Brabham, 2013)

In his literature review of crowdsourcing research from a human resource management perspective, Buettner (2015) suggests that a key aspect of successful crowdsourcing is the clarity that the "crowd is being asked to share its knowledge as users to improve its own experience". In their extensive systematic literature review about open innovation and crowdsourcing, Cricelli et al. (2022) argue that the real benefit of using open innovation and crowdsourcing comes when the creativity and knowledge from outside partners are well-managed and integrated using specialized methods. These principles lay close to the core of Trune and form its business goal: to gain meaningful music from existing human capital and convert it into something of business value.

The Experience Vision
A vibrant potluck gathering unfolds as friends and family converge, each bearing a culinary masterpiece. The air is filled with tantalizing aromas as an array of dishes, from savoury to sweet, are showcased on a communal table. Laughter and conversation blend harmoniously, creating a warm atmosphere. Participants indulge in a diverse buffet, savouring flavours from various cultures and traditions and exchanging rich stories of their past experiences.

The event fosters connection, culinary creativity, and a sense of shared joy, as attendees partake in a delightful feast where every dish tells a unique story. A potluck, a symphony of tastes and togetherness, celebrates the love of food and the bonds that unite us.

6.4 USE CASES

To make it clearer on how this service would be used and by whom, some use cases have been discussed. These are hypothetical scenarios based on my encounters in the field research, and aim to inform the reader on the different way Trune provides value.

The small chain of hipster salons
A small brand of men's hair salons consisting of 4 venues across the Netherlands is facing some music problems. Their target audience are young urban trendsetters, and their first priority is to create an experience that highly resonates with this customer. Their hiring process represents this, as they put an effort to hire individuals with a similar aptitude as their target customer. This means that all their stylists have good communication skills, an outspoken personality, and connect well with the customers, which gives the brand an added selling point.

Currently this chain utilises a SaaS commercial business service that gives a lot of music choice, but the managers do not know what to play. They would like to give the control to their staff members (seeing how aligned they are with the customers), but giving access to so many people proves to be too expensive. The result is a stream of mainstream music that does not connect with the target audience and is a pain for the staff to listen to. This affects the brand negatively and creates a mismatch in the customers' head.

On switching to Trune, many pain points go away. Trune allows the staff as well to choose the music, which is a big relief to the managers as it reduces their workload and creates more variety in the music. The managers also urge the stylists to play their own added playlists during their shifts, which adds a strong personality to each venue during different timings. This is also communicated to the end-customers, especially the regulars! The managers (usually present at the venues) can also easily skip songs that they feel are too far away from the brand's identity. They also trust the staff to add quality music, and rarely feel the need to check the curations.

This results in happier staff, less-stressed managers, and also more satisfied customers.

The single venue Indian takeaway kitchen
A single venue takeaway kitchen serving Indian food in the Netherlands is known for their high quality and low prices. Being in a neighbourhood filled with expat families and young professionals, their target audience varies. Their priority is to make quality food and deliver all their orders on time. Their employees mostly comprise of first and second generation south-Asian immigrants, most of them working full-time at the restaurant.

Almost everyone working in the store likes to work with music. They all play what they want to listen to as most of their orders are deliveries, and takeaway customers barely spend any time in the venue. To do this, they have a tablet with Spotify connected to the business owner's personal account. This system offers a lot of flexibility to play what they want, but there are also some pain points. Firstly, the business owner's playlists are always the ones played. The staff is free to operate the service and add songs to queue, but the day always begins with the owner's songs. This also means that the staff spends a lot of time playing around with Spotify, discussing what to play, and banter about who gets control. This causes annoyances for the owner as the staff wastes a lot of time, and his personal recommendations from Spotify also get muddled with everyone else' choices. Also knowing that using Spotify is illegal in businesses, the owner always has the fear of getting fined in the back of his mind.

Switching to Trune, a lot of his pain points are minimised. The commercial-use license gives him peace of mind, and his staff's music choices do not get in the way of his personal Spotify. Through Trune's touchpoints, staff can easily put songs in the work playlist in their off-hours, and do not waste as much time in their work hours as before. The staff also gets to see what their colleagues add, so the sudden banter when a song comes on is also lessened.

The large chain with young, rebellious employees (Kollekt's current issue)
A large fast food chain (15+ venues) struggles with managing their music. They have a contract with a music consultancy which provides brand aligned music for all their locations. However, the music played does not resonate with their business' employees, who have started rebelling by turning off the provided music, getting their own sound systems, and playing their own music. Due to the low physical presence of the franchise owners, this issue is hard to identify and regulate. Business owners cannot give full control to the employees because the store is still (to a large extent) customer facing and they are concerned about non-brand aligned music.

On switching to Trune, they find middle ground. By giving the option to the employees to upload their own music via collaborative playlists, and playing them mixed-in with the brand-aligned playlists, both parties are happier. The staff is also able to get full freedom during non-customer hours (opening and closing), and also gets some guidelines to help the music not stray too far from the brand. The business owners get the option to review songs on case they want to quality check, and also the extent of the mix-in (how frequently does the employee playlist play in the venue).

7. TESTING & VALIDATION

As a concept, Trune covers a broad range of functionalities and features with many different touchpoints meant to be used in specific business contexts. Though most of the aspects of the journey stem from prior insights and directions, there are some assumptions that need to be tested. These assumptions include:

1. The ability of non-experts to create music curations,
2. For Trune to work in harmony with Spotify, and
3. For business owners and employees to work together in such a service.

Hence, the concept has been tested in different ways. Firstly, Trune's inspire touchpoints were extensively validated with non-experts to see if it succeeds in supporting them. These tests also included Spotify integration to determine if that was feasible from a UX perspective. The business owner-employee dynamics were tested with the team at Kollekt using a role-playing approach.

Subsections in this chapter:
1. Methodology
2. Insights
3. Directions & Scope for further development

7.1 METHODOLOGY

The testing sessions made use of user interface prototypes, printed posters, and a semi-formal interview structure. The structure of the test was kept self-exploratory, which was in-line with the nature of the service itself, and the participants were given full freedom the explore the prototype on their own.

To test for the ability of non-experts to curate music, participants were tasked with creating a music curation for themselves. The participants were young people (between 24 to 32 years of age) currently residing in the Netherlands, Italy and the United States, with no professional connection to music or curation. The goal was for them to create a playlist of 10 to 30 songs in roughly 15 minutes (a hard time limit was deemed undesirable due to time-induced stress factors) by making use of the given prototype and anything else they wish to use. Spotify was used as the primary external music discovery and curation tool, with some participants deviating to their personal music streaming service of choice. After the task was completed, the participants were asked some questions about their experience in a semi-structured Interview format.

To test for the dynamics between different actors in the process (business owners/managers and multiple employees curating together), another test was done with the Kollekt team. The task and methodology were kept similar, but in this case the task was done together with a group of 4 participants, with one acting as the manager. All participants worked on one collaborative playlist and discussed the result at the end. The manager was also responsible for putting some musical guidelines for others to follow, and did a quality check to see how aligned the final result was.
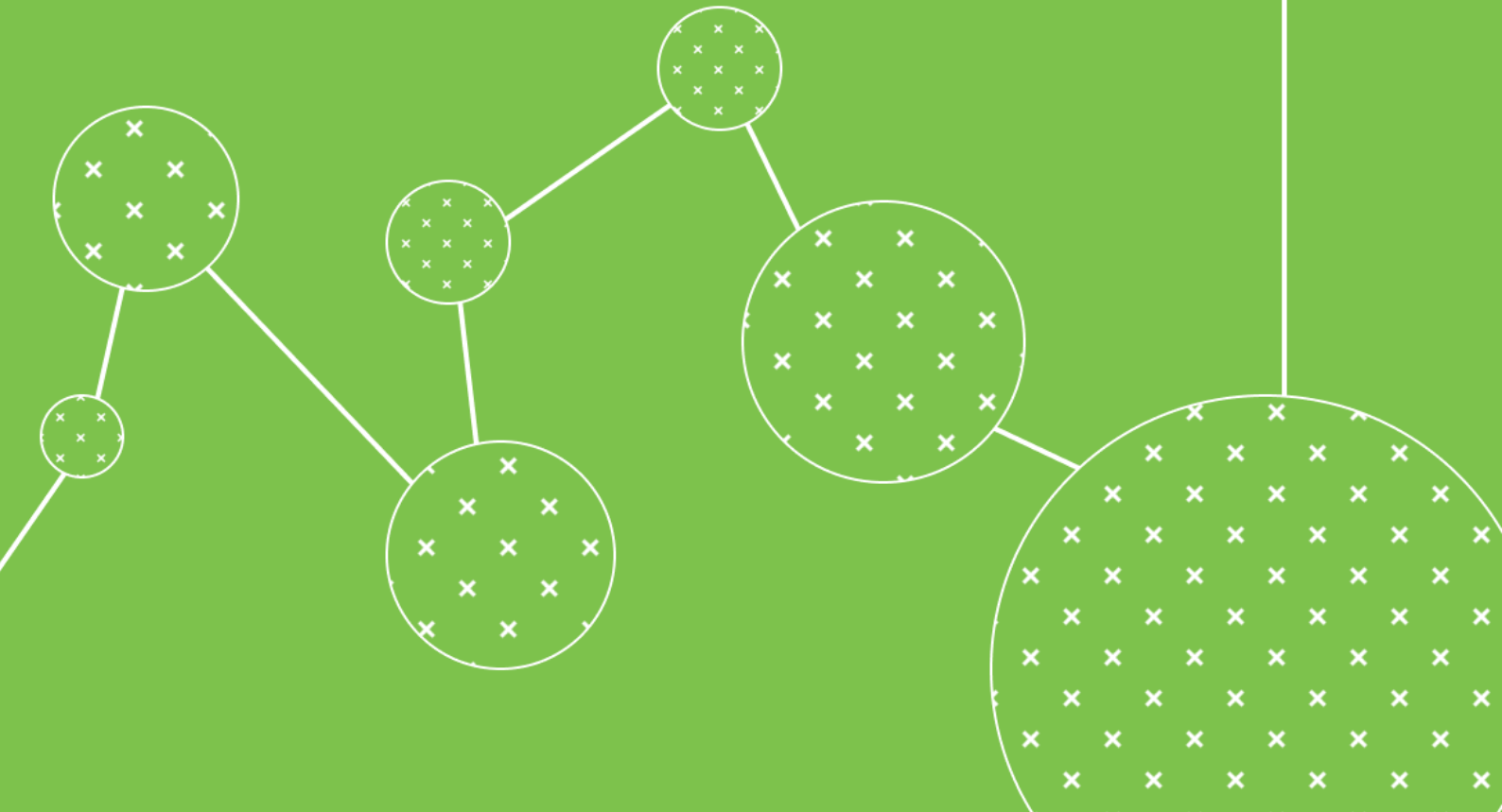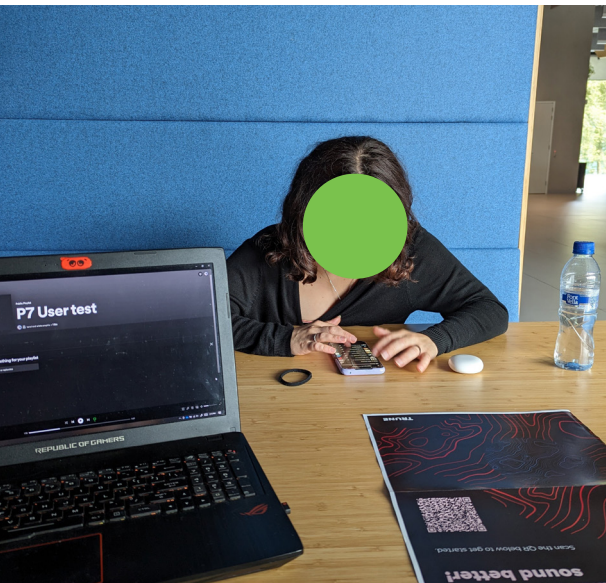
7.2 INSIGHTS

A total of 12 testing sessions were conducted, resulting in some new and rich insights.

"This was way better than going through random playlists on Spotify."

Participants mentioned that the tools provided a more directional approach to curate music than surfing playlists on their personal music services. This gave them more clarity and a good result in a short time frame.

[Figure 7.2.1 to Fig. 7.2.12 User testing]

"Looking at my friend's playlists is fun. I saw [name redacted] and I was like, oh I feel like listening to the kind of music he listens to."

It was discovered that participants enjoy looking and adding music from their peers' playlists. This is because they have good memories with the musical associations of this person, even if it is not a music profile they are highly familiar with.

"The prompts was cool. Whenever I felt like I was getting stuck, I went back to it and generated a new one."

Getting "stuck" emerged as a recurring theme in the tests, which means that the user struggled with finishing the task in a way they were happy with. The more indirect and open tools (prompts and time capsule) were seen as valuable in these times, whichh helped them get over this barrier.

"I saw the roadtrip prompt, the favourite city, and my friend's name. Individually they didn't do much but after some time these things sort of mixed up and I came up with this song that reminds me of all of those."

Another interesting insight regarding connections was the mixing of different stimuli the participants experienced, and the results that came from it. Even though the tools offer directions that seem very different from each other, they all can work together to provide meaningful curations.

"This is not the song I actually meant to add. I looked another one up and saw this in the suggested, and figured this is actually better."

Another key theme that emerged was that of "connections". Almost all participants mentioned that many of the songs in their final playlist were not the ones they intended to add, but stumbled on to while looking for other songs.

"For me, the first couple of songs end up creating the vibe for the playlist. This tool really helped me find those, and then I sort of just did it on my own."

It also became clear that different people had different processes. More musically autonomous people, for example, followed a very independent approach with minimal intervention from the service. These users relied on looking at the playlists offered and taking songs they liked or knew. More hesitant and unsure participants were more engaged with the service and instead relied on the prompt tool to give them concrete directions to think about.

**"This is my friend's and my song. We dance to it all the time."**

"I play this song with my friend all the time in her car. We also scream-sing it together ."

Most participants mentioned songs in their playlists that were deeply nostalgic and meaningful to them. This partly validated a key assumption of the inspire touchpoint, that non-experts can curate meaningful and enjoyable music given the right tools and stimuli.
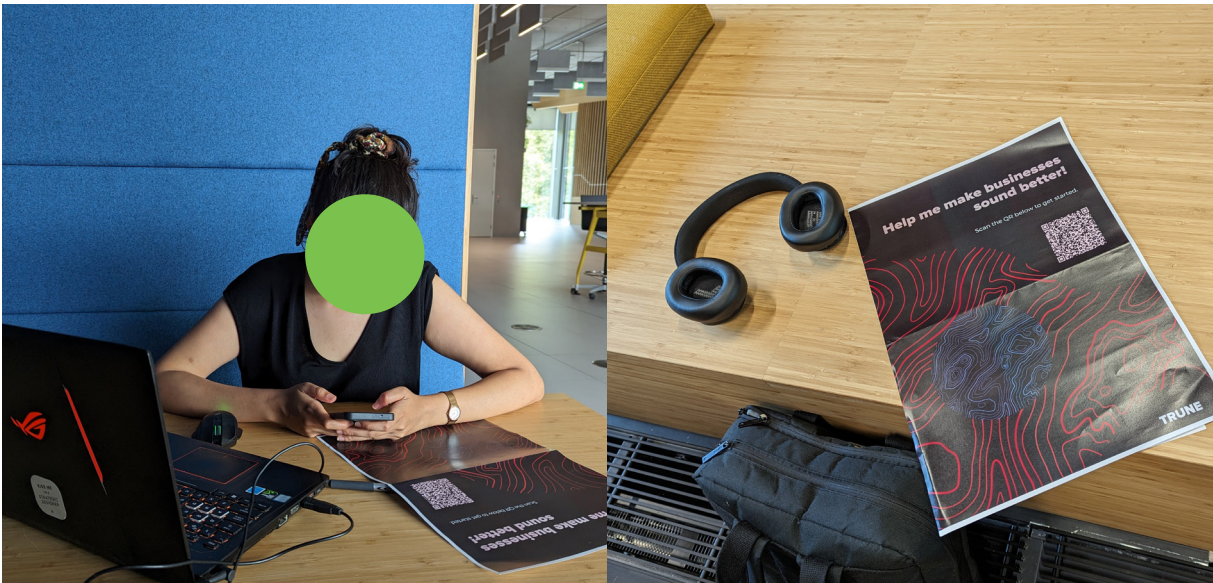
"I felt like I kept getting lost in Spotify. I mean there is already so much to do there, it was hard coming back to this app."

A drawback of the service's reliance on personal-use music streaming service was discovered. The participants mentioned that because there are so many playlists and recommendations Spotify offers, and the already huge collections of the users' own liked music and collections, it is very easy to get lost in it and not come back to the service.
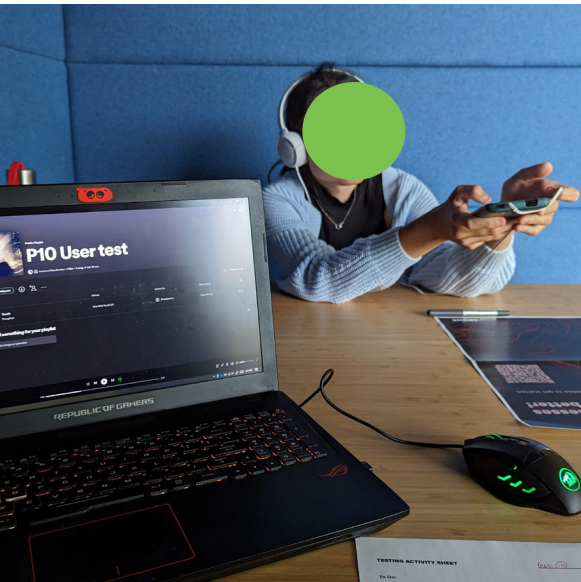
"I usually make my playlists really fast so I like that I had to sit down and really think about the songs I add. It made a big difference in my opinion."

The tests also provided insights on how a non-expert usually curates music for themselves. While experts may spend hours listening to tracks and sorting through them, non-experts usually rely on familiarity and quick scanning of existing playlists. This tool gave them a way to spend more time on it, and the participants believed it helped them deliver a better result.

"The time capsule, like I get the idea, but it was hard for me to think of music directly from some pictures. Especially with the ones that were shown, maybe it could work with some other ones."

The time capsule was a hard task for many participants, as they found it hard to connect old pictures to music directly. The few results that came out seemed to be very meaningful and nostalgic, but often the pictures did not give rise to memories or the participants did not have musical associations with them.
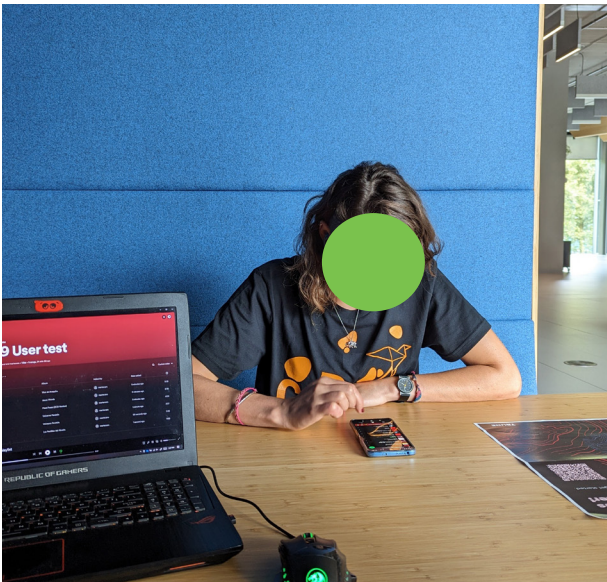
"Yeah, I would play this song on a first date. But that doesn't necessarily mean I enjoy hearing it at work."

A drawback of the prompt tool was the disconnect between a person's work mindset and their personal lives. It was suggested that the prompts could be more in the vicinity of work life, as straying too far may lead to disconnect and a mismatch in mood.

"Not sure if I would actually share my personal pictures for the time capsule. You'd have to show me a lot of benefits for me to really do that."

As data privacy and possible risks are a volatile subject right now, participants were sceptical of giving access to their private social media or drive access to a service like this. They mentioned that a service meant for occasional use for business purposes may not feel as trustworthy as more customer-centric high engagement applications where there are direct rewards of picture sharing.

7.3 DIRECTIONS & SCOPE FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

In these tests, many themes emerged and new ways of interacting with the tools were discovered. Many assumptions were validated, but also several possible issues came up, all of which can be utilised in further development beyond the scope of this project.

1. While curating music, there are spontaneous connections coming into play. Thoughts bounce from one prompt to a peer's name, leading to a song, which connects to an artist, and so on. This volatile and unpredictable thought process can be utilised to curate more meaningful music as more variety of stimuli provided can lead to more possible connections.

2. Personality types and personal levels of musical confidence can change how users interact with the application. In this context, less autonomous people liked to use the prompts, while more autonomous ones liked to explore given playlists. Hence, it is important to provide a variety of tools that can help a broad spectrum of users. In case a future iteration of this service aims to target a particular segment, it is also good to keep this in mind and divide the user segments by these metrics.

3. It is interesting how users interact with the given tools. "Prompts" are a good way to get started as they provide concrete direction to think towards. This is also used by people who do not like to explore new music. The "Explore" section provides a good way to find music users like by exposing them to a large volume of tracks. This may also be a good way for users to keep engaged, as they can find new music and expand their taste profiles. The "Time capsule" emerged to help people remember music that is deeply meaningful to them but was a little too abstract for some users.

4. Most participants mention that their curations reflect their mood and mindset at the time of curating and might change completely if the test was done at a different moment. As the service is not instantly updated, the difference in the users' choices between their current mindset versus future mindset may need further investigation.

5. The tools could also be iterated towards more work-related stimuli. For example, the prompts can be about the work and activities instead of the user's personal life, and the time capsule could have pictures of the staff team instead of an individual's personal pictures. This could also create a more collaborative (instead of individualistic) approach to curation.

6. Data privacy and trustworthiness needs to be considered while building a product like this. This is relevant not just for the time capsule feature, but also for user's willingness to share their music and app activity with peers.

8. IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter discusses the strategic fit of this solution with relevance to Kollekt, how it could be implemented and embedded in the company's offerings, and how it could leverage their current assets to do so. Some recommendations are also offered.

8.1 STRATEGIC FIT & COMPANY INTEGRATION

This project and the concept delivered aims to provide Kollekt with a concrete direction and proposition to expand to a new market with low development investment. The designed solution fits with Kollekt's vision of utilising the potential of their current assets and expertise, and is in line with the company's inherent value of human curation. Furthermore, it can also provide value towards their current clients looking into this direction, and can also be included as an added value offering to the primary Agency model.

Variety in propositions is desirable
For a lot of companies (especially start-ups), there is hesitance in developing something radical that strays from the primary proposition. However, a study from 2020 researching the impact of ambidextrous innovation in organisations suggests that firms operating in uncertain and competitive markets benefit from developing a portfolio of both radical and incremental innovations. (Nukhet et al, 2020) The study also discusses that the firm's willingness to cannibalise on existing market share by developing products that do so, in competitive markets, could prove very beneficial. For Kollekt, this provides evidence and confidence for going for such a bold strategy. Currently, the agency and partner proposition can be seen as incremental innovation as they build on the company's current services and propositions, and the conception of this new future pillar can contribute to a superior financial performance and organization growth.

Using what we have, not creating what we don't
Looking at today's technological landscape, advancements in AI and machine learning take the centre stage. While music services like Spotify are increasingly becoming more and more reliant on AI and data-driven recommendation systems, it became clear early on that for Kollekt that is not a desirable direction. Being a small team, Kollekt's focus has always been on delivering high quality and value on their current propositions, and this direction would just be too far away from the company's DNA. Hence, the created solution instead focusses on working with harmony with those services and aims to put forward the magic of human curation.

The adaptability of Trune
Though Trune is made with smaller businesses in mind, it can be scaled towards better servicing Kollekt's current client base as well. It could be integrated into the agency and partner propositions as an opt-in service, making a new monetizable value addition. This could be done by breaking the service into smaller parts and using what is more easily integrated in the current proposition. For example, only offering the element of a shared collaborative playlist to the staff for businesses struggling with staff rebelliousness.

8.2 LEVERAGING CURRENT EXPERTISE AND ASSETS

A key aspect of this project since its conception has been to utilise the potential of Kollekt's current assets and expertise to create new value pillars. Understanding what the company has to offer and investigating how it can be used differently has been a priority since the start, and in this section, we discuss how the designed solution leverages these assets to unleash Kollekt's true potential.

Utilising current client needs and feedback:
The direction of staff involvement in music was first informed by Kollekt's current clients, which the solution offered builds on. Hence, the foundations of this new proposition lay in Kollekt current and prior experiences, which means the company already has clients with a desire for such a service and can be potential early adopters. This also creates opportunity to pilot test and iterate with businesses already in contact with the Kollekt, minimising the need to find research participants.

Using Backstage and Atmosphere as key touchpoints:
Research into the company's current services revealed their music management and scheduling platform (Backstage) and in-venue playback app (Atmosphere). These are robust digital products that have gone through countless iterations informed by real-world client feedback. It became clear that utilising them was not just an advantage for Kollekt, but they could be an invaluable resource for this project. Gaining hands-on access to them, I was able to explore them freely which greatly helped me design the new solution with them in mind.

For Trune to be an end-to-end service, there is a need for several different touchpoints. Though the staff involvement approach adds new functionality that needs to be developed from scratch, the need for music management, scheduling, and in-venue playback remain similar. For these needs, Trune has been designed to fit in between these two existing products. Modified versions of Backstage and Atmosphere can be further designed, requiring substantially less development work as compared to developing everything from scratch.

Learning from the experts
Another aspect that was important to me was learning from the experts while creating this platform. Research showed that the expert curators at Kollekt have a complex and particular process to curate music, which is quite complex for non-experts to adopt. However, some elements from this process were added to aid non-experts into curating better music. For example, experts at Kollekt always work with guidelines and key tracks in mind, which are discussed with the client beforehand. In Trune, the managers can freely write (simpler) guidelines for the employees to keep in mind while curating. Another example is spending time, experts spend hours combing through different playlists to find the right tracks. Non-experts are much quicker and impulsive with their choices, and Trune attempts to make them more mindful of this process.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS & FUTURE SCOPE

The final section of this chapter discusses the recommended next steps for Kollekt in terms of implementation and further work, the limitations of this project and concept, and the opportunities this project offers for further work.

On Immediate Implementation
For the implementation of Trune, or a similar service, a lot of elements need to still be validated. Variable factors like intra-team dynamics, music-brand alignment, personal employee aptitudes, could all play a major role in the effectiveness of this platform and need to be investigated further. To do this, it is recommended to do extensive pilot testing and identify smaller market segments where this platform can find its footing. It can then be iterated based on user feedback, and gradually scaled to a broader target group.

On Further Design and Detailing
Though the design of Trune in this report offers the fundamental functionalities it deals with, there are a lot of details still left to be designed. For example, the onboarding process of the business owners and the employees, the way the communication touchpoints interact and develop, shielding the service touchpoints from possible misuse, automating specific touchpoints (poster design and print), etc. It is recommended that the company prioritises which detail is necessary to provide the primary business value, and then proceed to the others.

A Gateway to long-term dreams
This project can also be a steppingstone towards Kollekt's other ambitions. Developing an independent SaaS service could be a gateway to "The Marketplace", which has been a long-term vision of the company to connect freelance curators from all over the world to businesses for their background music needs. By helping non-experts curate and gain insight into how their music can affect businesses, Kollekt could also help inspire a new wave of passionate music curators.

Possible Spin-Offs
Though this project concludes with a concrete result, that is not the only thing of strategic value. The path leading up to it has rich insights that the team can use in other ways. For example, from the user testing insights with non-experts, a tool to help them curate better music for their personal use could be created. Another one is the direction of end-customer involvement, though an enticing opportunity, still leaves a lot of room to be explored. Through these open endings, this thesis also aims to spark and inspire new ideas in the huge (and still quite unexplored) realm of commercial background music.

The Cons of Depending on Spotify

A key limitation of this concept can be its dependence on external music services (in this case, Spotify) and the possible risks associated with it. Firstly, Spotify is a completely independent entity with no affiliation to Kollekt. For Kollekt to utilise their service for commercial purposes, there may need to be legal agreements regarding terms of use and other regulations, which could be costly and may not offer the flexibility needed for the concept to function. Secondly, Spotify is a very dynamic platform with constant updates and beta user testing. This means that it may change often, and be different for different users. This may cause experiential issues and give rise to conflicts. This also means that in cases where Spotify is down (for example, due to server issues), Trune would also have limited functionality. Lastly, Spotify is an app designed to keep users engaged. In the user testing, it became evident that users find it easy to "lose themselves" in Spotify, which sidetracks them from the task at hand and could potentially lessen the value offered by the platform designed.

Data and Privacy Concerns

Some aspects of the concept, like the Time Capsule, utilise the participants personal data through third-party app integration. With data regulations and privacy issues becoming a rising concern, it may become difficult to do so. In the user tests, participants mentioned that the service needs to build a feeling of trust for them to consider this. The service also utilises the users' private Spotify accounts and shares their playlists and added songs with their colleagues, which some people may not be comfortable with. Hence, it is important to integrate all information regarding data use and privacy throughout the platform and keep all participation voluntary.

On Scaling and/or Expanding

Though the solution space of this project is informed by both theoretical and empirical research, it must be noted that the research participants for the field study were small business owners in specific parts of the Netherlands. The context of commercial use music services can vary greatly between different regions due to factors like cultural shifts, value differences, and legal requirements. Hence, it is recommended that before taking this proposition away from the studied region, it must be tested, verified, and iterated to providing a more context-relevant product.

CONCLUSIONS

This additional section discusses the final conclusions of the project, including the value additions, limitations, and scope for further work.

Helping Kollekt scale to new markets has proven to be a multi-faceted challenge. From dense market competition to a lack of proximity and network with the desired market segment, a reframing of this assignment proved to be an essential step towards attaining a fruitful result. An extensive research phase was carried out consisting of internal (company) and external (market, academia, and field) analyses, which provided rich insights for this reframing, and gave promising new directions towards the desired value proposition.

It was discovered that staff involvement in the background music is an increasingly desirable need for modern businesses as it has the power of giving them an edge over their competition. The direction does so by promoting staff well-being, which is found to affect customer experience positively, potentially increasing business value; and also staff empowerment, which makes the business a more desirable place to work for potential new talent. Though research showed that this direction holds value both theoretically and empirically, it is currently not being catered to by any of the market competitors. This creates a potential blue ocean for Kollekt to utilise, and provides ample opportunities to pioneer an industry-wide focal shift.

The solution space for this direction is explored, and several concept iteration cycles result in the designed product-service concept "Trune". This solution is designed to be integrated into Kollekt's current technology ecosystem and aims to provide Kollekt with an edge over the market competitors by creating an added value proposition of staff involvement and well-being. Its essence lies in fostering a more inclusive business music environment, and using music to create an atmosphere people love to work in. It comprises of several easy-to-use touchpoints which aim to encourage and inspire these music non-experts to curate meaningful music for themselves.

Through prototyping and user testing, it was found that users enjoy (and often feel the need of) external stimuli to curate music. Nostalgia, a powerful tool to unleash meaningful ideas, was also utilised to inspire, which was appreciated. However, some aspects of the concept did not resonate with the users, leading to rich directions for further development and iteration.

Lastly, directions for implementation of this concept and its integration with the company's current assets are discussed. The strategic fit and alignment of the concept with Kollekt's own mission and values is also discussed, and several recommendations regarding the limitations of this project, further scope, and future development are discussed.

It must be noted that the implications of this project are greater than just the presented concept. Over the course of this project, it was discovered that the commercial background music space has always borrowed from personal-use music services. From the invention of the phonograph to the FM radio, and now to personal streaming services like Spotify and Apple music, businesses have always been relying on either personal audio solutions, or slightly modified versions of them. Kollekt's mission defies this industry trend and aims to create a space for businesses to create their own music identity, enabled by a service designed especially for them. This thesis builds on that mission, and hopefully provides the company with enough ammunition to broaden the commercial background music domain even further, and be its own specialised industry.

REFLECTIONS

This additional section summarises my personal reflections and learnings, and ends with some final thoughts regarding this thesis.

Personal Learnings
This project has been one of my most challenging assignments yet. The previous one and a half years exploring strategic design and its nuances, I became smitten with the idea of combining design strategy with digital products. Music being one of my greatest passions, I decided to experiment and attempt to combine everything in this project, and that is how this assignment came to be. Needless to say, it has been a journey of immense academic and professional learning and revelations, but it also gave rise to many personal learnings and sparked new directions within me.

Firstly, I realised that I enjoy ambiguity. In one of the courses in the SPD master, we were tasked with creating an identity for ourselves and answer the question "Who are you as a strategic designer?". I chose to be a "Strategic Explorer", someone who navigates the sea of ambiguity looking for undiscovered opportunities, and then makes sense of it. In this project, I played exactly that role, and enjoyed it thoroughly. There were several moments in this project when everything seemed to crumble, and things did not go as planned. In the Strategic Explorer analogy, I would relate this to a deadly storm where only the most resilient survive. If the explorer is equipped with the right tools, the right crew, and possesses a strong will and resilience to navigate harsh seas, the explorer will succeed in his mission. I believe I lucked out there, my crew (supervisory team, friends, family, and everyone else who supported me) was always by my side through thick and thin, and my academic knowledge and experience from the last two years equipped me with the right tools to handle all kinds of situations. However, one thing that I believe has strengthened in me is the resilience and will in the design process. This project also tested out my chosen identity as a strategic designer, and now I can delve into the industry knowing what I want to do. This, I believe, has been one of my most valuable learnings.

Secondly, balancing academia and industry requirements is a hard task. It requires constant alignment from stakeholders with quite different priorities. There were moments in this project where there was misalignment, which I believe was often due to my own lack of clarity. I realised that as the project manager and the project executor, I needed to operate on a much higher level of autonomy than I am used to. A strategic designer's role is inherently collaborative and to get "buy-in" from stakeholders, but how does he do that without knowing what he wants buy-in for? Though this realisation came a bit late in the project, it was the trigger for me to get back in control and find alignment between all parties. It also made me feel more confident in my choices and decisions, and that there is often hidden overlap between stakeholder priorities if you see it from the right perspective.

Lastly, and maybe a bit like the first point, I tested more assumptions about my professional ambitions. Working in a product company on a music-related innovation project, this assignment checked all the boxes. This led to many learnings. I realised to work in the music industry is not the same as enjoying music as a passion or hobby. However, the passion does play a role in the connection I felt to my work, and the same results would not have been possible if that didn't exist. In my experience, the strategic designer is always looking to make an impact. I believe the impact feels a lot stronger when there is a deeper connection between the designer and their craft. I am not sure if this means I narrow down my future professional trajectory to only one domain, but it inspires me to work on projects I feel deeply about.

Final Thoughts
To me, it is interesting to think about why something so seemingly elementary as staff involvement in the business' music has not been catered to yet. Ever since the industrial revolution, businesses have been focussing on efficiency, which means focussing all their energy on their primary proposition. Staff has often been treated as a means to an end: people that help provide the customers with the business' product or service. Hence, the music services have never cared for the staff (or even the business owners, as they are also employees who are often in the venues), because they believe it is not the desired market need. This great assumption (though well-grounded in historical context) has led to many pain points discovered in this project.

It makes me happy to discover that this is changing. As the workers' rights revolution gains speed, business owners are forced to think of how they treat their employees. Being exposed to bad and toxic work environments and having a larger choice of businesses to work with, people are also becoming more selective in choosing who they work for. Employees now demand businesses to show evidence of how they treat their staff, and businesses have no choice but to comply. Services such as Glassdoor and Trustpilot are prime examples of an informed employee can cause hiring crises at toxic work environments.

I believe music can definitely play a role here. Businesses looking to create a better work environment for their employees can easily start from the five senses. If their environment does not look, feel, smell, or sound great (there is taste as well, but that may not be relevant), the staff is probably not having a good time. Choosing their own music to work in can be a steppingstone for them to feel more comfortable in their work, and lead to great success for everyone. But it should not stop there, businesses have a responsibility to create an environment that is safe, healthy, and comfortable for their employees, and a great business always strives for the highest employee satisfaction.

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A.1 PRELIMINARY HYPOTHESES AND FIRST CONCEPTS

From the inferences of first research block, 4 preliminary hypotheses were created and ideas corresponding to them were generated. These hypotheses stemmed from a combination of the literature review, company intakes, and the competitor analysis, and this process was very preliminary. In validation tests, it became clear that these hypotheses lacked uniqueness, but they provided good direction to proceed further. To validate these hypotheses, 4 ideas were made tangible in the form of landing pages. The main propositions of each has been attached here.

APPENDICES

A collection of all relevant supporting and additional documents involved in this project.

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List of Appendices:
1. Preliminary Hypotheses and First Concepts
2. Perceptual maps
3. Detailed Brainstorm Sessions
4. Materials for field research
5. Detailed Conceptualising
6. User testing sheets
7. Relating my Personal Motivations and Approach
8. Initial Process and its limitations

Figure A.1.1 Idea for Hypothesis 1: "People want something simple. They just want to legalise their own playlists and want as less choice and work to do as possible."
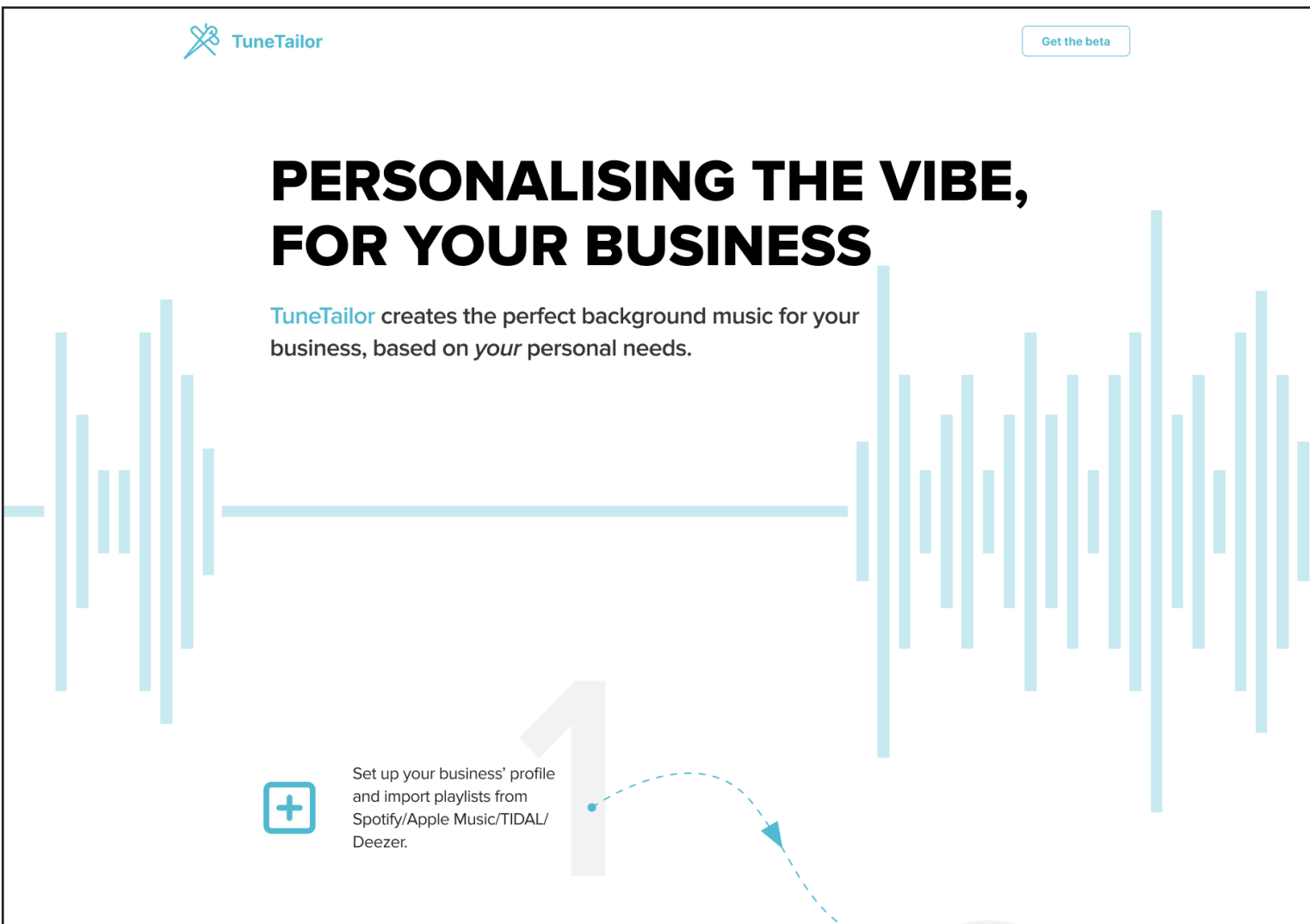
TuneTailor

Get the beta

PERSONALISING THE VIBE, FOR YOUR BUSINESS

TuneTailor creates the perfect background music for your business, based on *your* personal needs.

Set up your business' profile and import playlists from Spotify/Apple Music/TIDAL/Deezer.

Figure A.1.2: Idea for Hypothesis 2: "Kollekt's essence of personalisation must be preserved, even in a scalable low-budget product."

Synergy

Get the beta

(right) BACKGROUND MUSIC = ↗ CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Studies[1] show that roughly 70% of consumers believe music enhances in-store experiences, and that music chosen with consideration to the brand can result in an increase in purchasing.

Synergy enables you to blend your musical taste with your customers', resulting in playlists that resonate with both your customers, and your brand.
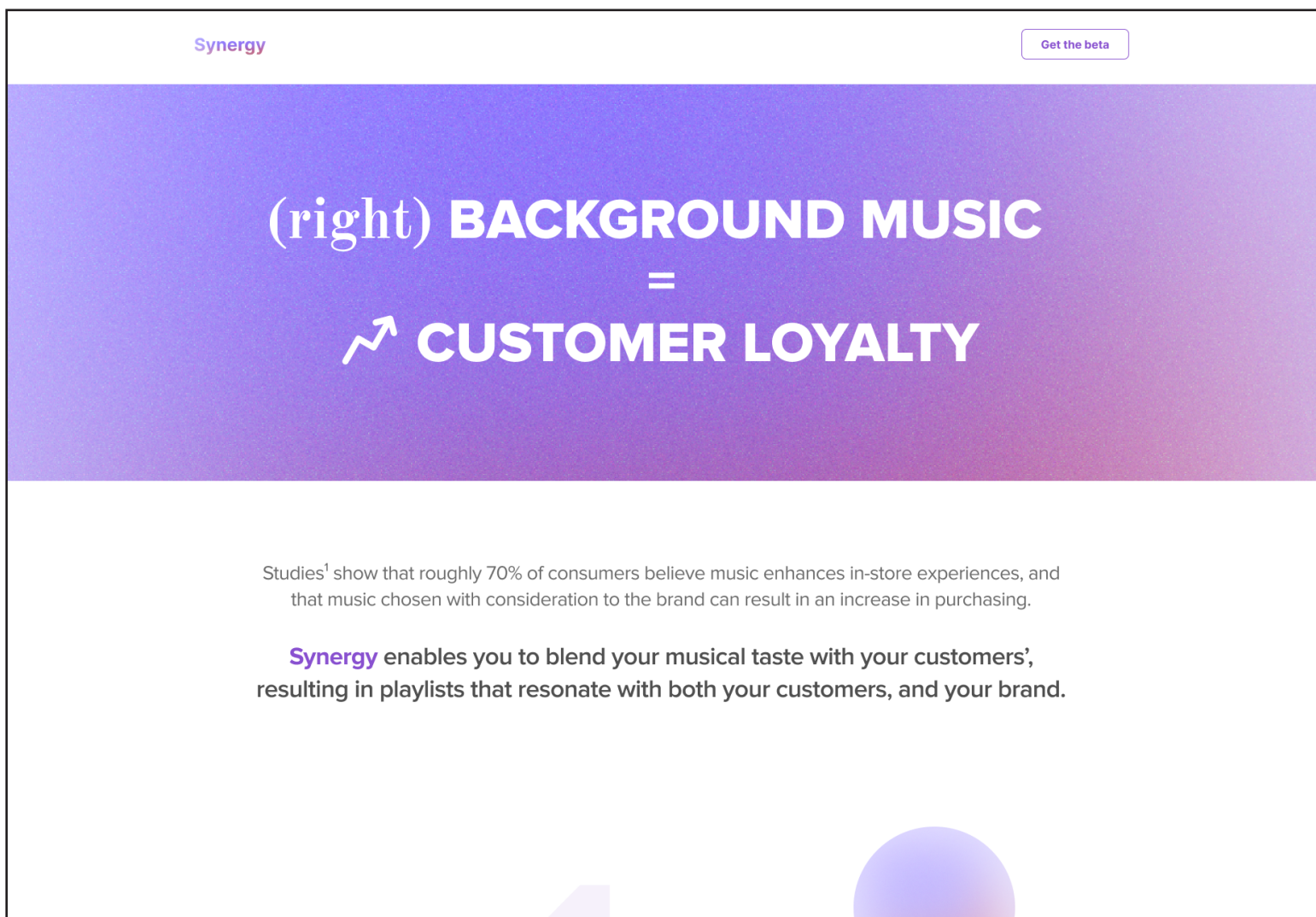
Figure A.1.3: Idea for Hypothesis 3: "Crowd Sourcing in curation could be an enticing USP for businesses looking to increase their customer loyalty."

BackgroundTools

Get the beta

THE ALL-IN-1 BUSINESS MUSIC SERVICE

At BackgroundTools, we know everyone needs something different. Fill a brief survey below to see what might work best for you.

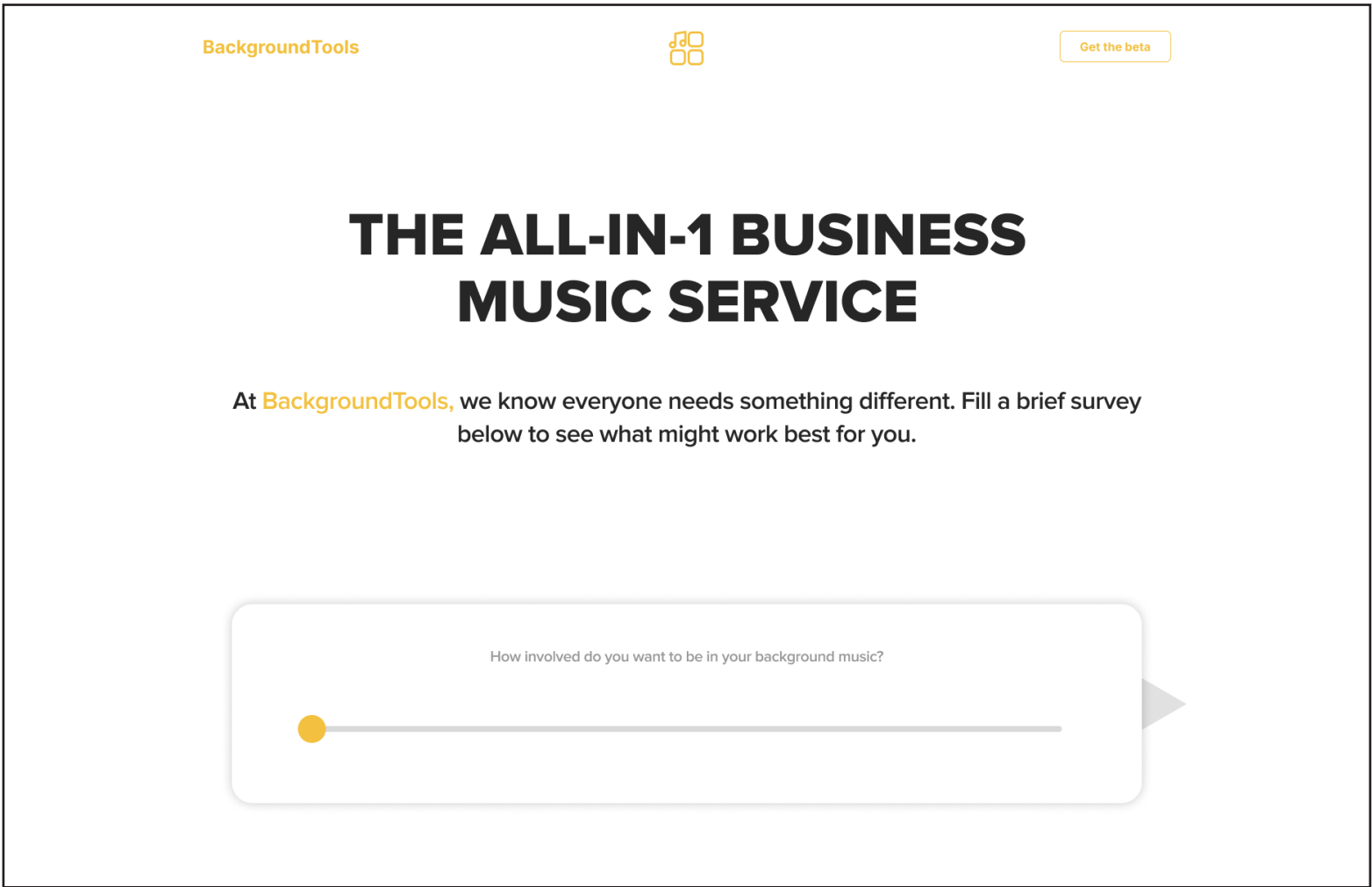How involved do you want to be in your background music?

Figure A.1.4: Idea for Hypothesis 4: "We already know all that is needed in the background music space currently. The need is to combine it all in a very good product."

A.2 PERCEPTUAL MAPS

In order to find where the value can be increased and find gaps, some perceptual maps were made, ideas were generated in line with this approach and discussed with the Kollekt team, but were not found to be very impactful and aligned with the company's expectations. I attribute the failure of this approach to two reasons. Firstly, perceptual maps (in design and marketing) are a tool to understand how customers perceive different products and their relevant positioning in the greater competitive landscape. As all these services are B2B, their brand perception is more ambiguous and harder to gauge, which makes it difficult to plot and utilise the full potential of this tool. (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011)

The first map considers two important dimensions for customer acceptance: the barrier to entry and the spectrum of offerings. A broad spectrum of offerings can entice big or ambitious customers, but it can also scare away customers looking for something simple. The barrier of entry includes multiple factors, like the ease of signing up, the number of service touchpoints, the onboarding process, and the pricing. It is important for a low-investment SaaS product to have a low barrier of entry, but it is tough to execute in practice (as evident in the map).

There seems to be possible opportunity in the bottom right quadrant: A low barrier ot entry and a broad spectrum of offerings. Currently only Soundtrack Your Brand is in that space, and even that is not maximizing the market gap. This map implies that if we can somehow give more offerings in a simple, easier and accessible manner, we may be able to differentiate ourselves from the competition.
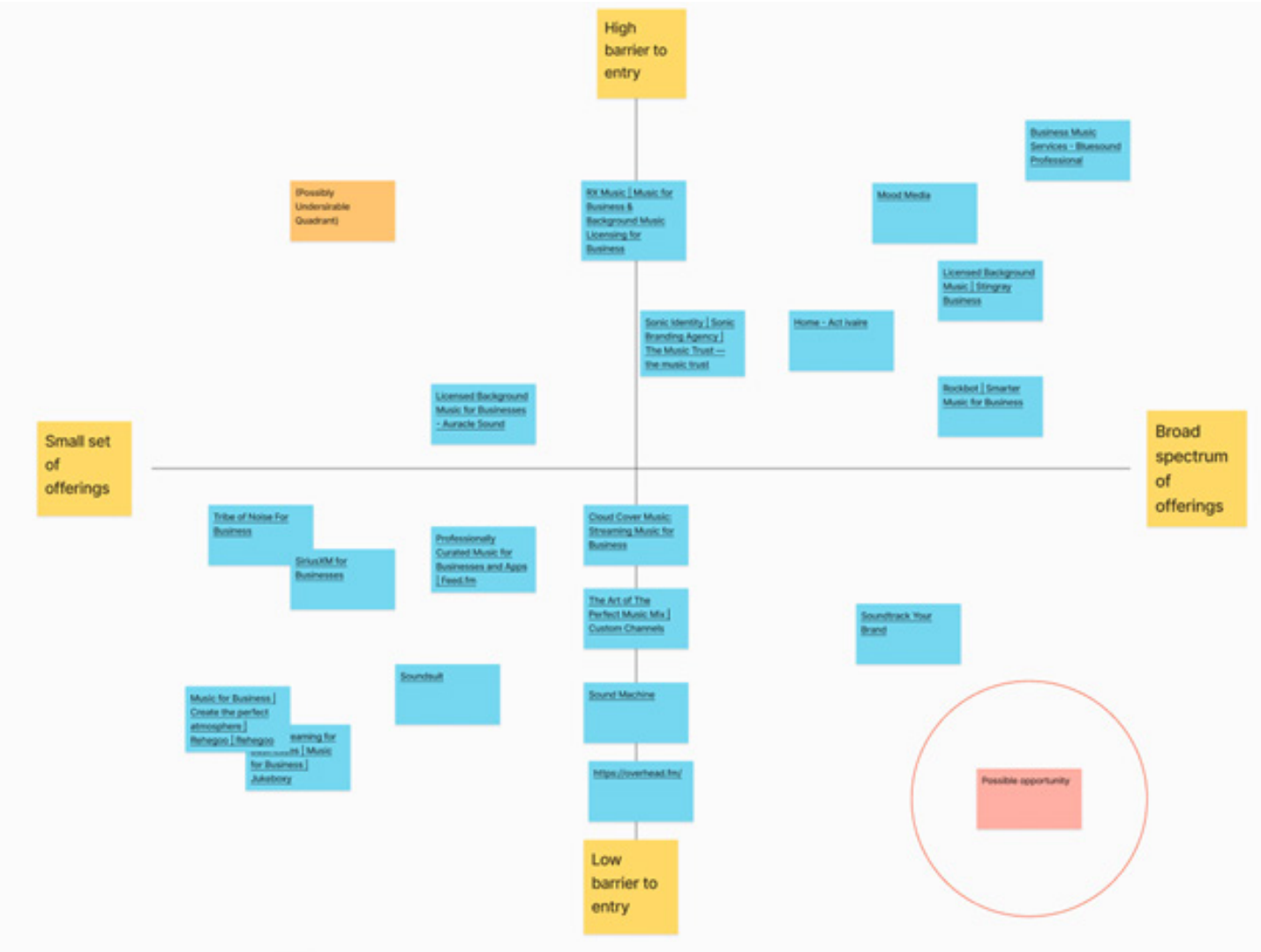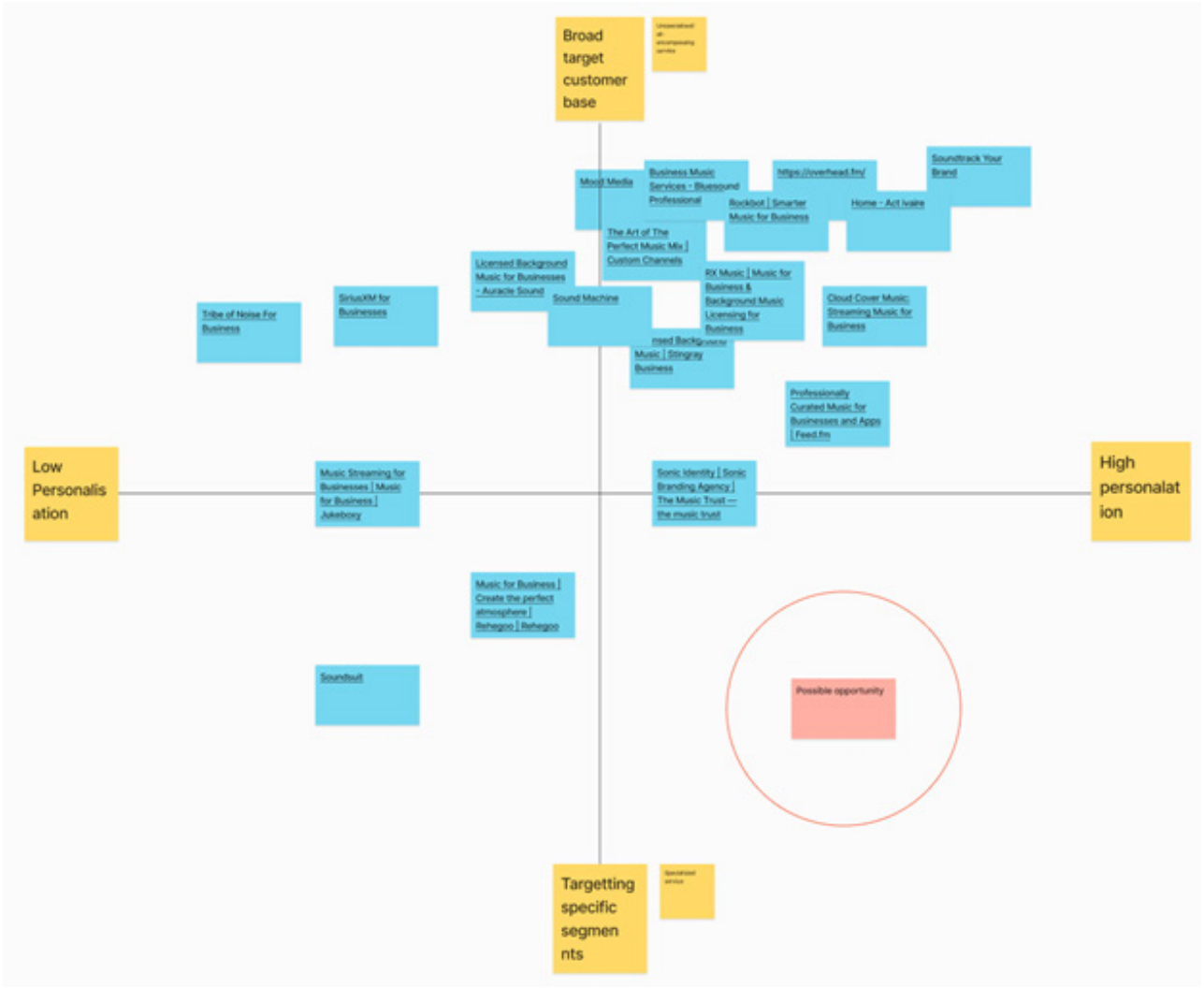

Figure A.2.1 Perceptual Map 1

Figure A.2.2 Perceptual Map 2

The second map considers another two dimensions that can possibly indicate a market gap: level of personalization possible (for the brands, in the product) and the size of target market. Here we see an interesting pattern, the popular competition is saturated in the top right quadrant (high personalization options, broad target market). It is also interesting to note that the broader the target market, the less specialized the service becomes. Services like Soundtrack Your Brand or SoundMachine offer the same service to widely different businesses (like supermarkets and spas), with a lot of personalization options that completely depend on the person managing the service. On the other hand, a service like SoundSuit (see bottom left corner) offers a single venue tier which is specialized for small brands offering low personalization and a simple UX.

From this map, we see two possible gaps: the bottom right and bottom left corner. The bottom right corner (high personalization, small market segment) is a big gap, and the bottom left (low personalization, small target segment) though relatively denser, also presents opportunity.

A.3 DETAILED BRAINSTORM SESSIONS

First Session: Explorative Insights
The aim of the first session was to explore and gather more perspectives. In other words, I wanted to explore music curation horizontally and get a broader understanding of it. I first began with a brief introduction outlining the project context, the assignment, and the aim of the session. After that, the session was in three parts:

1.   Role playing as Business Owners:
All participants received a sheet of paper with a small paragraph about their role. All roles were of small business owners but differed with respect to their personalities (illustrated by the tone of voice of the copy). The specific details such as their (fictitious) name, business name, business type, services, were all left blank for them to fill out. The aim was to sensitise them of the perspective of a business owner, and it was crucial that they embody the role given to them.
The copy was written and prepared ahead of the session in first-person with the help of AI tools, and the participants were asked to fill and read it out loud during the session. They were then asked a few questions, like what they think of background music in their business, how they would go about acquiring it, and what problems do they foresee. After everyone wrote several problems, they were asked to choose their top three and share it with the group.

2.   Clustering the problems into key themes:
This was the converging phase of the session, where the group attempted to cluster all the problems found into themes. The goal was to come up with relevant themes that can give direction towards the ideation, and everyone worked together to do so. In the end, a total of eight themes were discovered.

3.   Brain Writing to explore the solution space:
The next step was brain writing, a rapid ideation technique that also encourages co-creation. It was facilitated by blank sheets of paper with the newly discovered themes and open space to write ideas. Everyone got one sheet and one minute (per sheet) to generate rapid ideas, after which the sheets were rotated. The person receiving a sheet had the choice to either come up with a completely new idea, or to build on the last one. The aim of this exercise was not to come up with concrete solutions, but to explore the realm of possibilities that exist in the specific themes.

Key Ideas and Insights: Session 1

1. From the perspective of business owners, several different factors play a role in the music service decisions. These include the kind of service to be chosen (background music, DJ, Live bands, etc.), legalities (additional licencing and permits required), equipment required (cost and maintenance), end-customer's experience, possible technical issues, level of investment required (cost, time, effort), curation process, and the relationships with the stakeholders involved (if there are external curators, DJ, live bands, etc.).
2. Considering human curation, quite some participants raised the concern of expectation management and alignment. They mentioned several issues (like indecent/irrelevant songs, human errors, identity mismatch) could arise and possibly hinder the overall experience and decrease business value.
3. The idea of end-customer involvement was also touched upon. It was discussed that there might be psychological issues that may come up, like insecurity and becoming self-conscious if their music is announced publicly, and the possible feeling of added stress.
4. There were a lot of preliminary ideas on how to solve the issues mentioned in the above points. Some of them included the need for quality checks in the curation, voting systems for stakeholders to co-curate the music, having backup sources of music in case of discrepancies, different ways to get feedback from stakeholders, and many more. I believe that though this session was exploratory and did not provide concrete design directions, it opened my mind up to new possibilities and helped me avoid tunnel vision.

Second session: Staff Involvement

This session took place quite a few weeks after the first session. It is good to note that before this session, the focus on stakeholder involvement became clearer and hence was taken as a key design direction. The aim of this session was to explore staff involvement in background music, in the form of both problems and solutions. As with the previous session, I first began with a brief introduction outlining the project context, the assignment, and the aim of the session. After that, the session was in three parts:

Informal Debate on Staff Involvement:

The four participants were divided into two groups of two and were asked to debate on the pros and cons of staff involvement in background music. Both teams were given 5 minutes to prepare, where they could openly discuss with each other and use the internet freely. The debate was of about 20 minutes, with me acting as the moderator.

The aim was to get a deep understanding of the different factors that come into play when staff get involved, and a debate format was chosen to get a holistic perspective (instead of a one sides view). It was not specified how the staff is involved and was left entirely up to the imagination of the teams debating. After concluding the debate, everyone took some time to note down the key insights and ideas that were talked about.

Clustering the insights into key themes:

Like in the previous session, clustering was used to converge towards key themes. Everyone worked together to do so, and this step was challenging as the insights were not necessarily of the same nature (some were problems, some were ideas, and some just general remarks). In the end, a total of 8 relevant themes were discovered.

Brain Sketching to explore the solution space:

This time the next step was brain sketching, where instead of writing down the ideas in words the participants are asked to sketch them to encourage more creativity. It was facilitated by blank sheets of paper with the newly discovered themes and open space to sketch ideas. Apart from that slight difference, the activity worked exactly like the previous session in terms of duration, mode of operation, and goals.

Key Ideas and Insights: Session 2

1. There were several interesting themes identified when it comes to staff involvement, like the feeling of ownership and incentives, the psychological factors like insecurity or power dynamics within the staff, kinds of expertise offered, identity alignment with the brand or customers, and the end-customer's reaction to the music. This also reinforces the theme of psychological factors, which was already brought to light in the field research.
2. It was discussed that the staff may bring in a different kind of expertise to the table. For example, a local employee in a fast-food chain may have a better idea of the neighbourhood and the customers than the business owner/manager. This additional knowledge, if translated well, could prove beneficial to businesses.
3. The relationship between the staff and customers was also discussed, and how staff curation or high music involvement could play a role in it. For example, it could add a new topic of conversation and increase customer engagement and interaction. It could also add another dimension to the staff's personality in the eyes of the customer.
4. The topic of incentive and ownership was also touched upon, with both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Apart from simpler concepts like monetary compensation, ideas such as digital journalling to increase accountability, utilising the social value of music curation, and determining metrics that measures staff's investment level were also discussed.

Third Session: Customer Involvement

This session was almost identical to the second session in structure and aim but had a different point of focus: customer involvement. Hence, instead of debating, ideating, and sketching on staff involvement, the participants were focussing on the end-consumers of the background music.

Key Ideas and Insights: Session 3

1. There were several interesting themes identified when it comes to customer involvement, like the type of businesses, brand-customer dynamics, data collection methods, customer's psychology and mental states, and overall business value.
2. I noticed some overlap with the themes and insights from the previous session. For example, the brand alignment factors, data collection methods, psychological factors, incentives and ownership, all were ideas already outlined in the previous section. This sheds light on how both staff and customers, though portraying quite different roles for the business, are human stakeholders involved in the background music ecosystem.
3. In the cocreation part, there were ideas ranging from surveys to websites to mobile applications. There were also some interesting concepts regarding utilizing visual merchandising (customers can put their used receipts in a garbage can with two labels: I like the music, or I don't like the music) and even about music cocreation (a audio visual device in the venue that allows people to create basic music tunes and beats together, which can be played as background music).
4. The level of investment of the customers was also discussed. For example, how invested would a customer be to shape the music of a takeaway restaurant they spend less than 4 minutes in? These discussions provide direction towards the amount of cognitive load the final solution should have.

A.4 MATERIALS FOR FIELD RESEARCH

I am

An app-based streaming service that also lets customers suggest songs and give feedback to your music.

You pay a fixed monthly subscription, like standard streaming platforms.

I am

A web-based service that offers playlists made by experts, already being played in bigger businesses.

You pay a subscription based on how many playlists you use. First 3 are free.

I am

An online curated playlist store that lets you choose and play playlists made by people all over the world at your business.

You pay a monthly subscription based on the number of venues you have.

I am

An app-based Spotify playlist legaliser and music player for business use.

You pay a subscription based on how many playlists you import. First 3 imports are free.

I am

An app-based service that lets your employees create playlists and give feedback on music being played.

You choose from a tier based pricing model based on business size and features.

I am

A web-based streaming service that offers playlists and simple personalisation options for your business.

You choose from a tier based pricing model based on business size and features.

Figure A.4.1 Proposition Cards to spark & facilitate richer discussions with participants.

Fun/Lighthearted opening line

Hello, do you have a few minutes? I need some help and I bring chocolates. 😊

Small Intro

I am a student at the TU Delft studying background music in businesses like this. I am trying to develop something that can be really useful to the people working here and want to ask you some questions about that and maybe run a few ideas by you as well. Would you be down for that?

Great! Also do you mind if I record this chat? This is all confidential and only so that I can re-listen and make notes.

Questions

- Can you tell me a bit about your business? What's your role in it?
- What role would you say music play in it?
- Do you use any services for it? If yes, what are the best and the worst things about it?
-

Cards

Okay thanks a lot! Now just a small part left, I want to show you a few ideas I have [show cards] and get your thoughts on them. You can just read the card and tell me what you think about it for about a minute, and then move to the next one.

Did you have any favourites? Did you have any that you would NEVER use?

Do you mind if I take a picture of you with the cards? It is for my report and will of course blur out your face. 😊

End

That's it! Thank you so much for your help, here are some chocolates. Have a good day!

Figure A.4.2: Basic interview guideline

A.5 DETAILED CONCEPTUALISING

First Concept: ProjectEcho
ProjectEcho is an end-to-end SaaS background music solution for small businesses that focusses on human curation, staff involvement, and customer feedback. It is aimed at small businesses with 1-3 physical venues, with the goal of enabling business owners and employees to create their own unique sound their own way. It provides businesses several ways to create playlists, schedule them in advance, and play them in their venues. It also has a way to collect customer feedback on the music being played via QR codes placed in the venues.

A key aspect of this concept is that all playlists created are human. The service offers a collection of BuildingBlocks*, which the users are free to play around with (edit/mix/build upon), and also offers Spotify import of their own favourite playlists. These playlist creation features are also open to the staff working in the venues, who can submit their playlists to the managers. The managers can do the quality checks and get the final say about the approval of the submitted music, but they can also submit the playlists for expert review**.

*BuildingBlocks are a collection of large playlists created by the music experts at Kollekt, based upon the music they currently supply to their clients.
**Expert Review would be done by Kollekt's roster of freelance music experts.

The idea behind this first concept was to condense all insights and design directions into one holistic product/service. I did this by first creating a basic framework of how the service would operate (Mobile native SaaS product) and what it would focus on (human curation, staff involvement, and customer feedback). I then went into the details of how each function works, like BuildingBlocks playlist creation, import playlist function, music scheduling, employee submissions, and customer feedback. I also thought about the onboarding and profile creation, as that is a crucial part of managing a service with multiple users with varying levels of access.

Critical feedback:
After presenting this concept to the team at Kollekt, it became evident that though this concept "checks all the boxes" from the insights gathered, there were quite a few points of concern.

1. Initially, the depth of the concept was questioned. The team felt that the previous phases gave some rich and interesting insights, which did not make their way into the concept. The concept, though quite functional, at times failed to integrate the softer factors that went into creating such a service. For example, the psychological barriers that prevent staff from being involved in the music was a valuable insight to the team, but was not addressed in the concept.

2. There was also a lack of uniqueness as compared to market competition. The core idea behind BuildingBlocks might have been human curation, but the value provided to the user is quite similar to what SoundtrackYourBrand or other similar services provide. Apart from the staff involvement, the features of the product were quite like the competitor services (scheduler, play point app, mixing playlists), and the team missed the "wow" factor.

3. There also seemed to be a lot of focus on elements that did not stem from the design direction and research. For example, the BuildingBlocks idea and the ways to customise them seemed like a nice concept, but not relevant to the project's insights. The playlist scheduler also garnered similar feelings, as there is already a scheduler in Kollekt's Backstage platform and the new concept is essentially just a slight modification to it. It was suggested that instead of focussing on all the other elements and delivering a holistic service, the focus should be narrowed down towards one direction (staff involvement). This would allow me to go deeper into one direction instead of only touching upon many.

4. Lastly, building an end-to-end service like this from scratch is a lot of development work. From the conception of the brief, it was emphasised that Kollekt wants to utilise its current assets and wants to minimise development and maintenance work. This concept is not aligned with that idea, as it is highly complex and requires high investment (in terms of time, effort and money) to build.

There were also some parts of the concept that were appreciated, which I can take forward:
1. Creating a mobile native application is aligned with the insights gotten from the field research, as most users used their mobile phones or tablets to operate these services.
2. Having the open-closed hours option on the employee submitted playlists is a good addition. During closed hours, business owners do not care what the employees play, and hence can offer them full independence. However, open hours need to be quality checked due to brand and customer identity alignment.

Second Concept: ProjectSonic
ProjectSonic is an end-to-end SaaS background music solution for small businesses that focusses on staff involvement via music suggestions and feedback. It is aimed at small businesses with 1-3 venues, with the goal of recognising and involving the staff as a key stakeholder in the curation process. It involves three touchpoints: one for the staff, one for the managers, and one for the play point at the venue. Two of these touchpoints are already in Kollekt's roster: Backstage for managers and Atmosphere for play points. The third touchpoint is a standalone app where the staff can submit playlists, look at the current collection, and like/dislike the music being played.

The idea behind this concept was to reduce complexity and integrate the concept with the current technology that Kollekt has. There are minor development requirements in the existing products (Backstage and Atmosphere) and the third touchpoint is highly simplified as compared to the previous concepts.

Figure A.5.1 ProjectSonic touchpoint division

Third Concept: ProjectExto

This concept uses a different approach than the previous two. Through supervisory feedback sessions, it came to my attention that thinking in wireframes and concrete SaaS solutions may be limiting how I have been approaching these concepts. Hence, for this concept, I attempted to break away from it by a slight change in perspective. As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, staff involvement is also being explored by Kollekt in their current client projects. This exploration has resulted in some ideas and concepts that the company has implemented or plans to implement, stemming completely from the discussions with the client. Though these concepts are functional, they stem from limited empirical evidence. The company therefore believes there is a lot of scope of improvement, and my project insights could provide good directions to do so. Hence, for this concept I studied the current concepts being offered, mapped out the touchpoints, and attempted to integrate my insights within them.

By studying the existing cases, I would like to go back to a key insight mentioned in the Research Chapter - there are two different types of target businesses: ones that trust their employees with the music, and ones that do not. Kollekt has different concepts for both, and the communication with the client decides which concepts are pitched. In both cases, the staff involvement is done in the form of music submissions, but the extent of it varies. Fig X1. illustrates the two types of target audience, possible use cases, their characteristics in terms of music, and Kollekt's approach.

My next step after studying the cases was to map out the different touchpoints, note down my thoughts, and suggest interventions. Figures [XX} illustrate this process, and I note down my insights and interventions below:

1. First impressions can last the longest: I realised that the communication touchpoint that informs the staff of such a service has a lot of power. The design of such a touchpoint (including the visuals, copywriting, and tone of voice) can play a vital role in the acceptance of the service.
2. Rich interactions make people happy: The interactive touchpoint in the current concept is purely functional, it collects information and sends it to the next party. Making this interaction richer (even with the same functionality) in terms of overall UX design, visual cues, and maybe even gamification, could boost engagement and create affinity within the users.
3. Less reliance on third-party apps increase robustness: The way the system currently works is highly dependent on Spotify/other personal music streaming services. At this moment, this is unavoidable and undesirable, as research already shows the heavy reliance of target users on these apps. However, we can still avoid relying on other third-party apps like MS Excel to compile data, and integrate the service into our own technology. This would ensure a more robust service which can be scaled more easily.

Figure A.5.2 Analyses of Kollekt's current clients

Figure A.5.3 Analyses of Kollekt's current clients: Business Owner with high trust

BO with low trust

Current Workflow	Staff scan a QR code placed in the venues	Spotify UI opens, staff adds songs	Manager reviews music from the collaborative playlist on Spotify	Playlist syncs automatically with backstage with a predetermined mix-in setting
		A collaborative Spotify playlist that is shared with all employees, and is mixed in the current music with a track every 15 minutes.	The playlist is pulled from Spotify and synced constantly.	
Thoughts and notes	Easy step. Employees can also bookmark link for later	Done completely on the Spotify app	Done completely on the Spotify app	Mix-in settings already chosen by manager before.
Interventions	How are the codes presented, what information is the staff asked for touchpoints, possible frequency of interaction. Codes can vary with location.			How do the playlists appear in the scheduler and backstage? how does blocking a song work?
Design Directions	Redesign communications and initial touchpoints			Redesign Backstage to accommodate this service.

Figure A.5.4 Analyses of Kollekt's current clients: Business Owner with low trust

Fourth Concept: Trune

Trune is an end-to-end SaaS solution for small businesses aiming to make background music more equitable by recognising and involving the staff as a key stakeholder in the curation process. It involves a combination of physical and digital touchpoints, that aim to encourage staff to participate and take more ownership over their work environment. The target users of Trune are small business owners looking for a background music solution and are interested in improving their staff's wellbeing.

Trune is a combination of concepts three and four, where I aimed to combine the simplicity and interagration with the current systems of ProjectSonic with the nuanced and rich touchpoint redesign of ProjectExto.
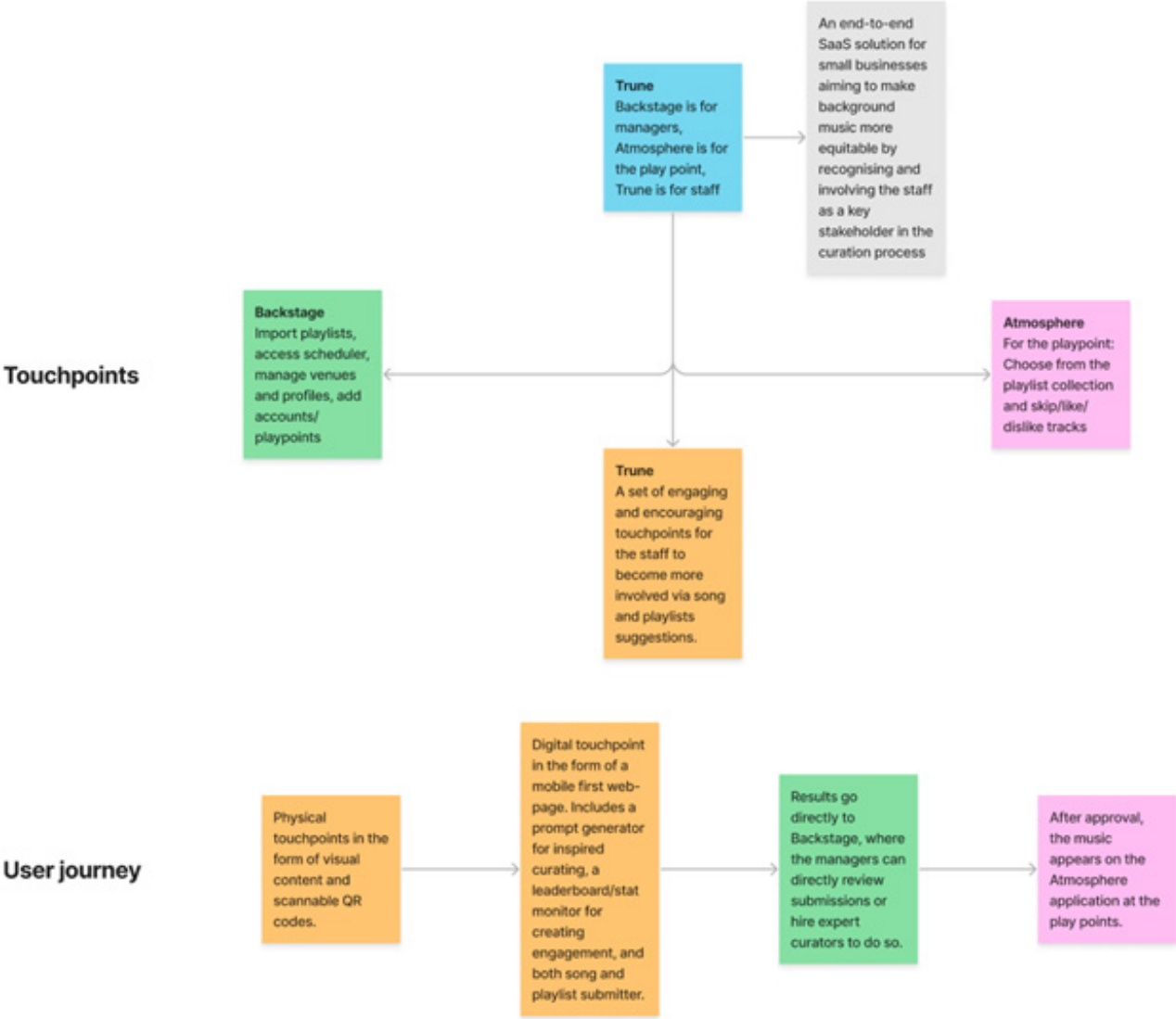
Touchpoints

Trune
Backstage is for managers, Atmosphere is for the play point, Trune is for staff

An end-to-end SaaS solution for small businesses aiming to make background music more equitable by recognising and involving the staff as a key stakeholder in the curation process

Backstage
Import playlists, access scheduler, manage venues and profiles, add accounts/ playpoints

Atmosphere
For the playpoint: Choose from the playlist collection and skip/like/ dislike tracks

Trune
A set of engaging and encouraging touchpoints for the staff to become more involved via song and playlists suggestions.

User journey

Physical touchpoints in the form of visual content and scannable QR codes.

Digital touchpoint in the form of a mobile first web-page. Includes a prompt generator for inspired curating, a leaderboard/stat monitor for creating engagement, and both song and playlist submitter.

Results go directly to Backstage, where the managers can directly review submissions or hire expert curators to do so.

After approval, the music appears on the Atmosphere application at the play points.

Figure A.5.5 Evolution of touchpoint division for Trune

TESTING ACTIVITY SHEET _____

To Do:

1. Inform about the project and this session. (1 minutes)
2. Get verbal consent for social media + names of 8 people close to them. (2 minutes)
3. Give consent forms + Edit concept for them. (2 minutes)
4. Introduce the task + Let them do it for 15 minutes. (15 minutes)
5. Ask final questions. (10 minutes)

Questions:

1. Before beginning, did you feel the need for these activities?

2. While doing the task did you use the activities for any of the added songs?

3. Which activity helped you the most and why?

4. Why did you choose this song? Can you go through your thought process for me?

5. I want you to look at this playlist and describe it in 3 words for yourself.

Figure A.6.1 User testing sheet
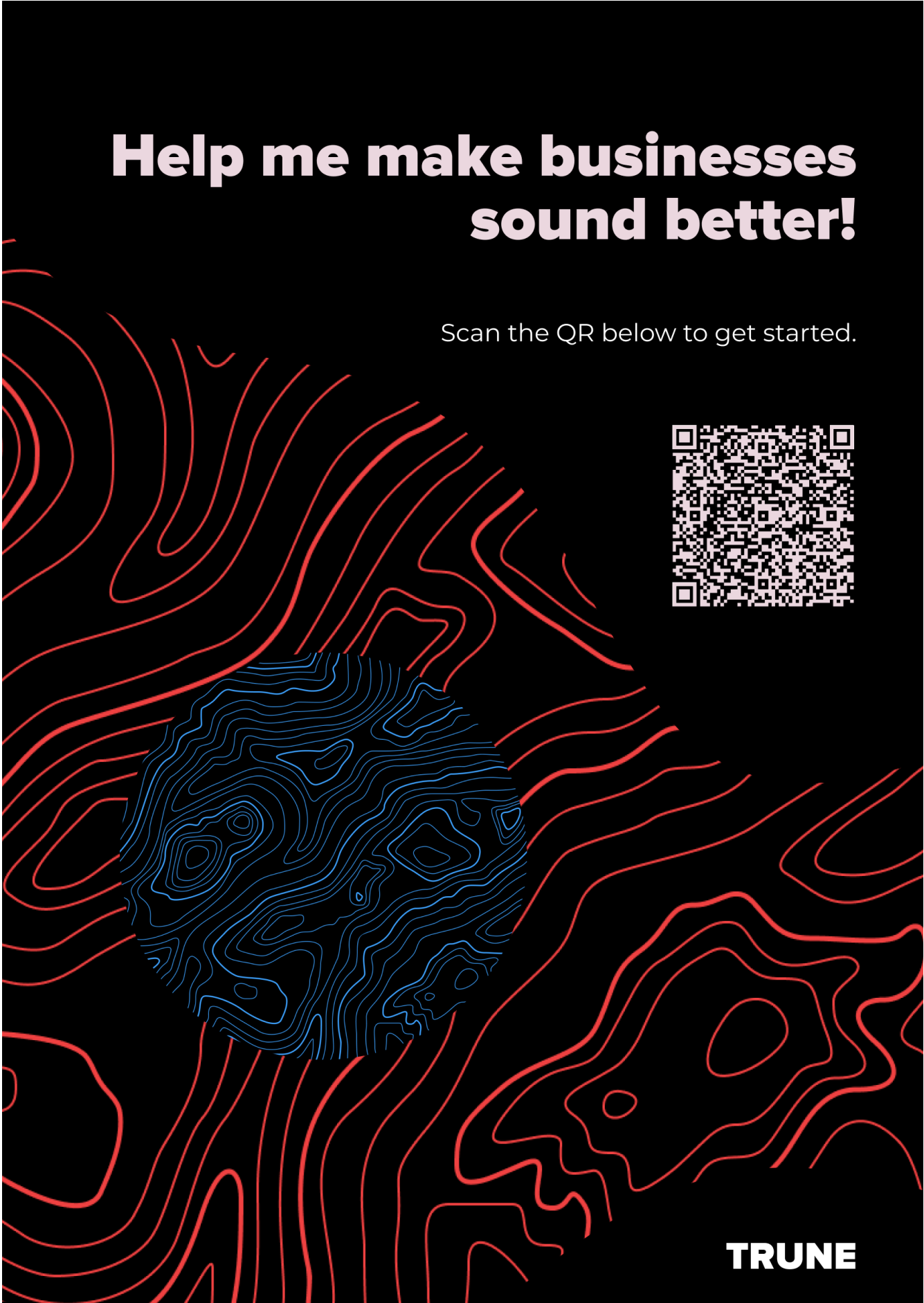
Figure A.6.2 Poster design for the test
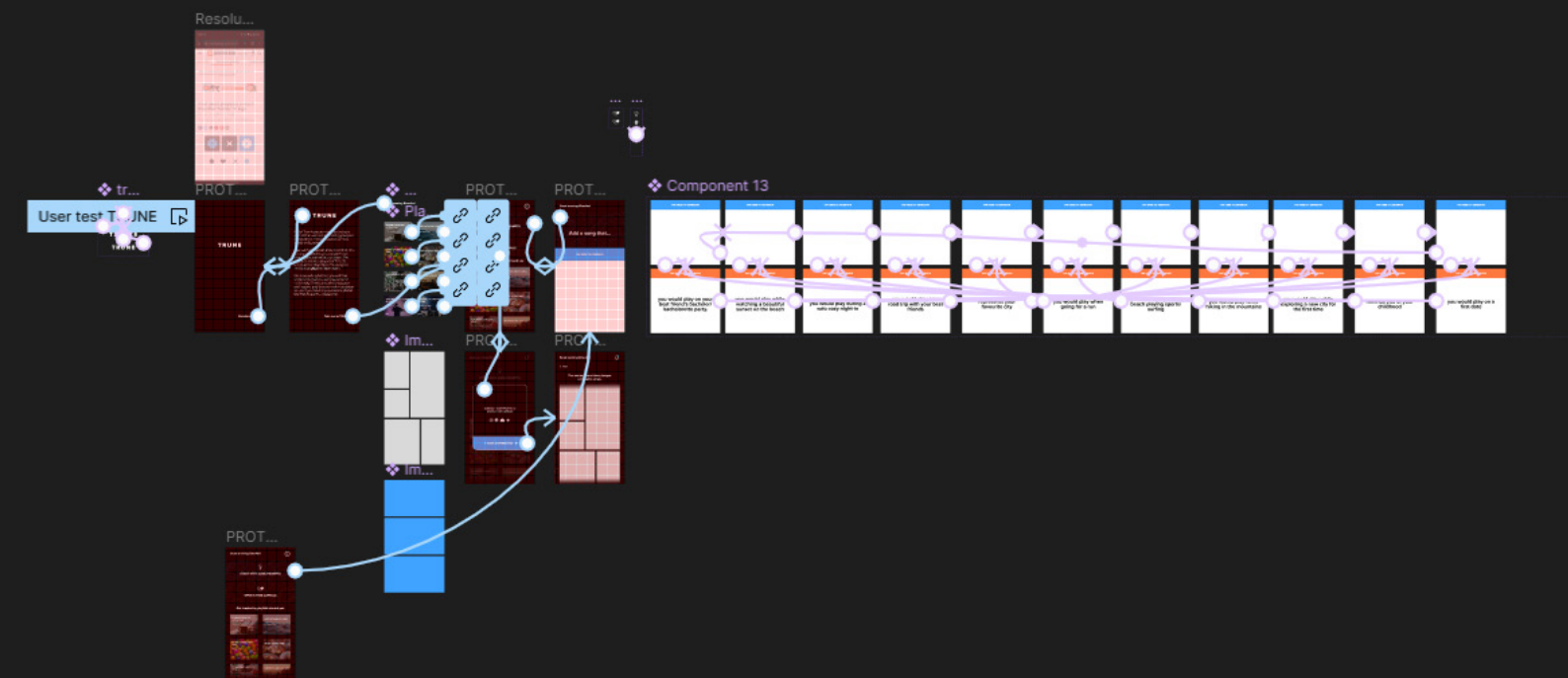
Figure A.6.3 Figma prototype creation for the test artifact
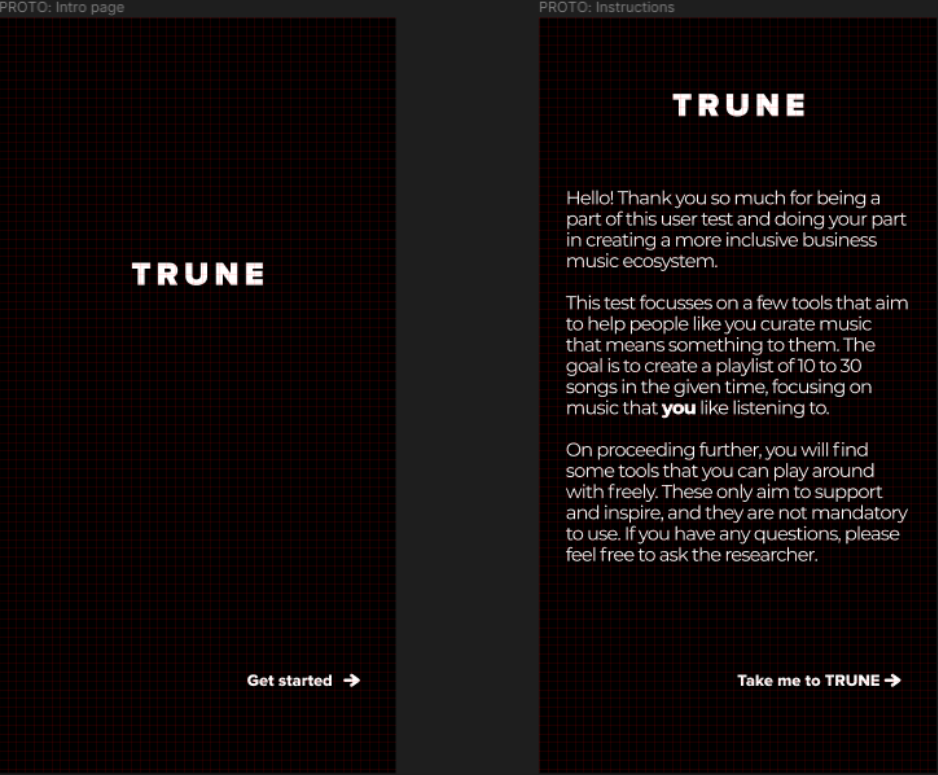
Figure A.6.4 Explicit Instructions for users

Figure A.6.5 Different prompts created for the prompt generator tool

A.7 RELATING MY PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS AND APPROACH

Before going into the process followed for this project, I believe it is important to illustrate my personal motivations and ambitions behind this assignment as they played a vital role in shaping my approach and mindset. With every motivation, I have also attached a guiding principle that has helped me stay on track and guided my decision-making process throughout the project.

Motivation 1: Breaking away from the hypothetical
Having a real-world impact is very important to me as a design practitioner. However, I constantly find myself designing for hypothetical scenarios, be it in the form of university assignments, personal projects or even client briefs. Though such projects are a great way to train creative thinking and the process of strategic design, there is sometimes a lack of real-world factors that I want to experience and learn from. Hence, I set up this assignment with an action-oriented startup that has a clear and concrete motivation behind the assignment. One of my key aims is to provide actionable directions to the company that they agree with and are willing to take forward.

Stepping in & out: This principle encourages designers to step back and take a fresh perspective on their designs. By taking breaks and stepping away from the project, designers can gain a bird's eye view that can give rise to new strategic or long-term insights and ideas that they may not have otherwise considered. (Martin, 2009) This principle also encourages designers to step into the shoes of the user, by empathizing with their needs and behaviours, and go into the details of their experiences. By doing so, designers can create more effective and intuitive designs that meet user needs. (Brown, 2009) This principle emphasises the importance of switching between different perspectives, and deciding which is more important for the end goal.

Motivation 2: Experiencing the working culture of a music company.
Being a passionate musician and product designer, a career in music technology is tempting to me. However, having never experienced such a company before, it became a priority for me to find an assignment with one. Due to this, I believe my approach to be quite hands-on with the company, with constant back and forth about their needs, desires and motivations. Over the course of this project, I have also had the opportunity to experience the culture, mindset, and process of a agency and product company like this, and I believe it has also influenced how I work.

Collaboration is key: This principle emphasizes the importance of collaboration between designers, developers, stakeholders, and users. By working together, these groups can leverage their unique perspectives and expertise to create more effective and innovative design solutions. (Kimbell, 2011) Collaboration can take many forms, such as brainstorming sessions, design critiques, user feedback sessions, or cross-functional design teams. By involving a diverse group of people in the design process, designers can gain new insights, identify potential issues, and ultimately create better designs. (Sanders & Stappers, 2014)

Motivation 3: Going zero to one
A key motivator for me to set up this project was my ambition to get into product management. I want to learn how a product idea is taken forward, from initial conception to delivery (zero to one) and observe which steps of the journey I enjoy the most. Though Kollekt is primarily a music agency, it is also a product company with two great offerings (Backstage and Atmosphere), which further convinced me of this direction. Due to this, my process and personal approach in this project has often been about balancing the explorative side with the pragmatic and delivering something unique but implementable.

Fail fast, fail often: This principle encourages to create and test multiple design solutions quickly, with the understanding that not all of them will succeed. By embracing failure and learning from it, designers can refine their ideas and ultimately create better designs. (Ries, 2011) Rather than investing a lot of time and resources in a single design solution on the first go, this principle puts focus on creating a minimum viable product (MVP) and gather feedback from users early on. This way, latent needs can be identified, and design issues can be addressed before investing too much time and resources in a solution that may not meet user needs. (Brown, 2009 and Kim & Mauborgne, 2004)

A.8 INITIAL PROCESS AND ITS LIMITATIONS

Based on the context and scope of the project, and my personal motivations, a new process was initially created inspired by the double diamond and a research-based hypothesis testing model in lean UX. The aim was to apply my process learnings from previous projects and combine the strengths of both, and I attributed the modifications to the following reasons:

1. Limited time and resources combined with a broad project scope: The double diamond method has always given me great results, but my prior experiences illustrate the need to make it more time efficient. That method stems from embracing ambiguity, and lean UX methods stem from eliminating ambiguity. Though combining both is a challenging task, I believe it would give me the perfect balance between a deep concept design and actionable insights.

2. Prioritizing user testing and iteration: The double diamond in principle gives equal importance to all phases of the process, and I believe prioritizing a certain phase or two depend on the project scope and context. In this particular case, I feel the solution needs to be validated in order for the company to accept it as a viable direction. Hence, I want to focus on constant testing and validation throughout the process.

3. Combining theoretical and practice-based processes: In academia, theoretical learning and literature are highly regarded, whereas in a startup ecosystem practice-based insights are given more importance. In this project, my attempt has been to combine both in a way where I can deliver the most value.

The new model consisted of 3 major phases (Hypothesis Formation, Hypothesis Testing and Development) and was a modified version of the design process (See Figure 1.1 and 1.2) aimed to combine theoretical and practice-based methods. From the figures, it is evident that the define and ideation phases had been pushed together to be done almost simultaneously, and instead of a concrete problem definition, this method relied on hypothesis formation and testing. The first quarter of the process has been left the same in order to diverge and explore possibilities, and the final quarter is also kept the same to detail and test concepts.
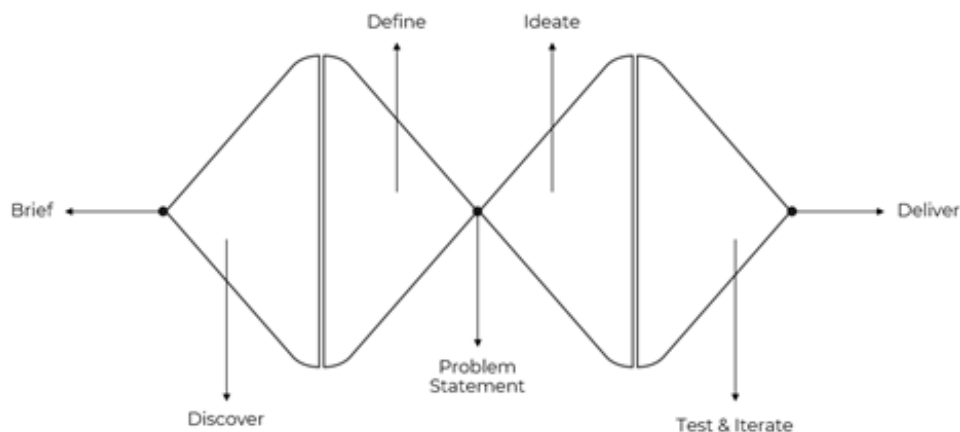

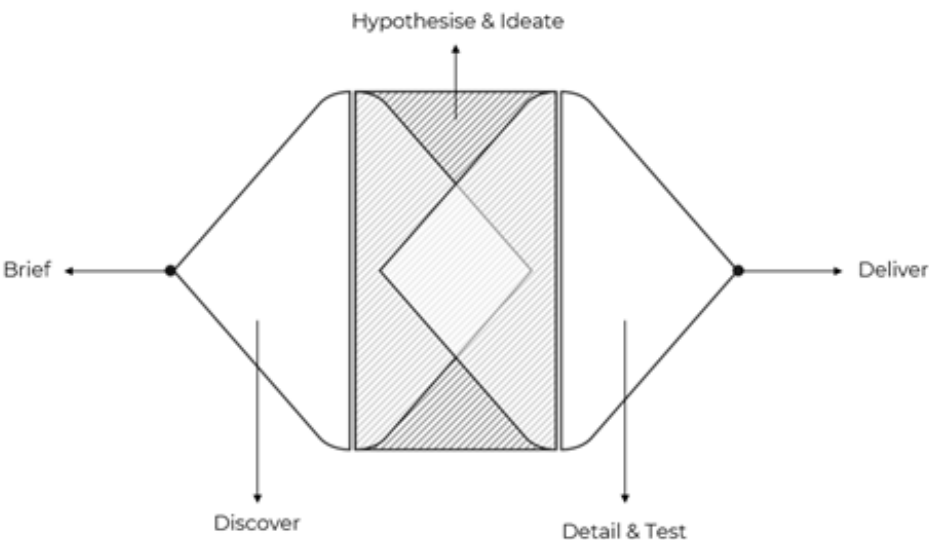Figure A.8.1 The Double Diamond model of the design process

Figure A.8.2 The modified model of the design process

Limitations and Drawbacks:

Though this process seemed theoretically sound, pursuing it was an experiment. After a few weeks, it became clear that there were some dire limitations which started hindering my project progress:

1. Hypothesis Testing is high investment: In order to do industry-level experiments for testing hypotheses, I required a big sample of relevant subjects willing to participate. This process takes either a lot of money (incentivising research participation) or time (finding the subjects that are relevant and would be willing to participate without external incentives). In this project, this turned out to be quite difficult, especially as the US market is far away in terms of proximity and network.

2. Lack of problem convergence: In Fig 1.2, a vital flaw can be seen. The end of the first diamond is a key convergence part in the process, where the designer reaches the problem statement. However, in my process, the problem statement was never reached. Ideation started before there was any real focus or design vision, which made the entire process muddy and filled with ambiguity.

3. Hypotheses formation needs to stem from practical insights: In academic projects, we form hypotheses based on prior literature. On the other hand in lean UX, hypotheses are formed based on real world data points. In this project, there was a clear lack of real world insights at the beginning which could not inform the hypotheses, and that made the hypotheses formed seem generic and simple. They lacked the richness that real user insights provide to the design process.

Because of all these points, I decided to abort this process and continue with a more design-oriented process with a key focus on testing and validation. However, I still do see value in is in a different (maybe industry) use case.