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# From Millennials to Alphas: Generational Shifts as a Catalyst for Futureproof, Authentic, and Sustainable Brand Transformation

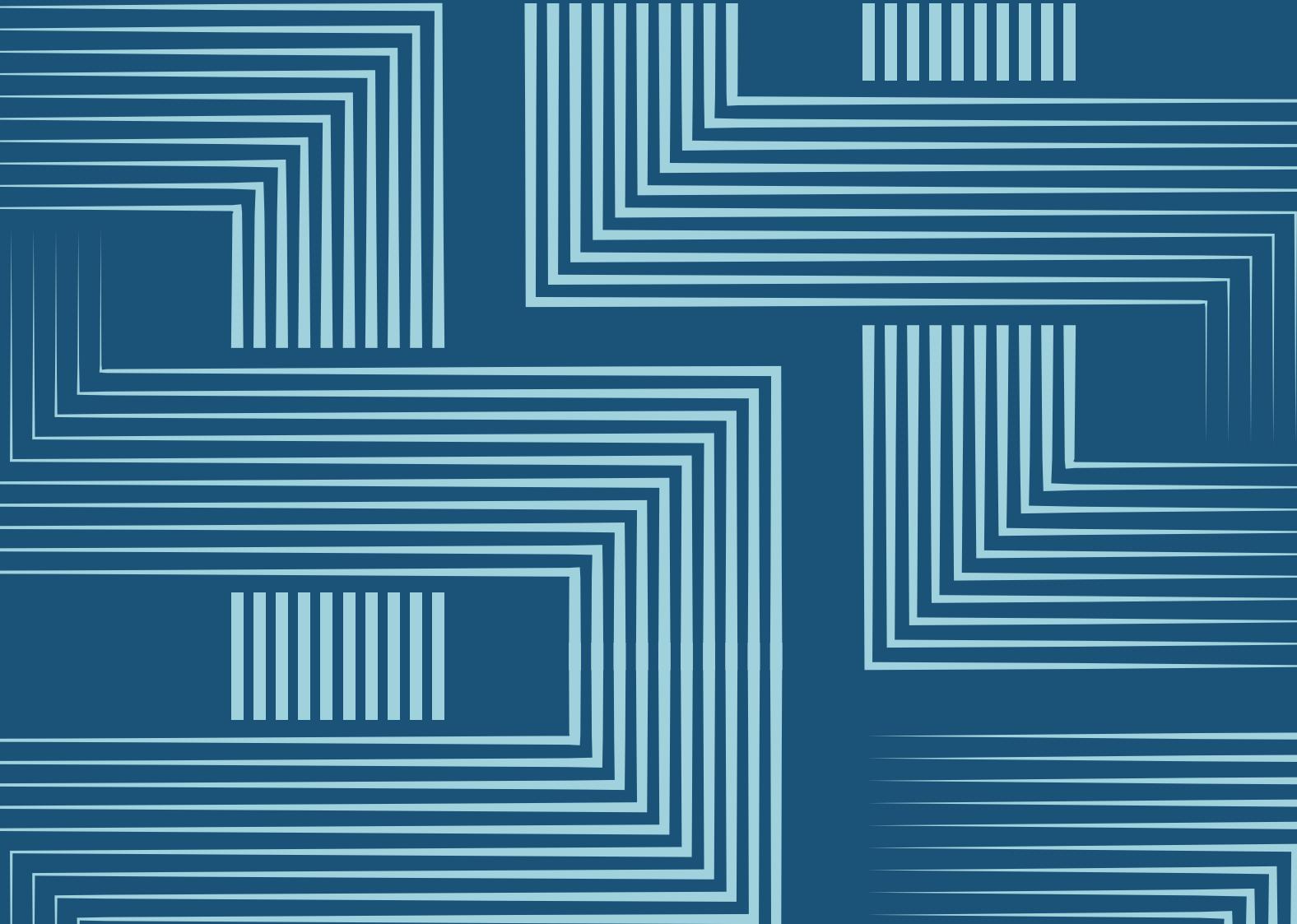
Exploring how brands can respond to the emerging generational shifts to authentically and sustainably transform their brand, through Transformative Branding.

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# I. Preface



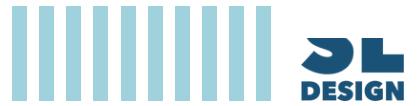
Over the past year, I completed a six month internship at frog, part of Capgemini Invent. frog originated as a design consultancy recognised for its disruptive, human-centred approach to innovation before being acquired by Capgemini to strengthen its system-level consulting capabilities. During my time there, I observed first-hand how branding played a critical role in shaping both the company's identity and my own engagement with it. What I initially perceived as a bold, independent design brand appeared increasingly constrained in the aftermath of the acquisition, its identity dispersed across shifting structures, priorities, and narratives. This shift manifested in subtle yet persistent tensions between long-standing "legacy frogs," newer hires, and colleagues who more closely identified with Invent.

These observations raised deeper questions. Was my heightened sensitivity to brand authenticity primarily personal, or did it reflect broader generational feelings? While colleagues acknowledged these tensions, many seemed less affected than I was. This led me to consider that an erosion of brand authenticity within organisations might mirror how my generation evaluates external brands more broadly. It sparked a curiosity about how generational cohorts, shaped by societal expectations, cultural narratives, and value shifts, connect their workplace experiences to their consumer behaviours, particularly around themes such as sustainability, corporate responsibility, and transparency. These reflections ultimately became the foundation for my graduation project, which investigates how brands can respond to emerging generational shifts to authentically and sustainably transform their brand image.

At the same time, my perspective as a Strategic Product Designer profoundly shaped how I approached this challenge. The SPD field teaches us to look beyond the surface of products or services and instead consider the deep systems, capabilities, and organisational behaviours that shape meaningful innovation. From this perspective, I became increasingly critical of a recurring pattern in industry: companies, whether commercial, governmental, or non-profit, acquiring design agencies (or hiring consultants) in the hope of "purchasing" creative or transformative capabilities. These acquisitions often fall short of their intended strategic impact, as capabilities cannot simply be imported; they must be cultivated, embodied, and maintained within an organisation's own structures and culture.

This belief directly motivated the direction of my thesis. As a Strategic Product Designer, I see it as part of my role to develop tools and methods that help organisations build such capabilities from within, especially those that promote ethical, sustainable, and societally responsible forms of value creation. Creating something that empowers brands to sense societal shifts, navigate generational expectations, and transform with authenticity aligns with both my personal motivations and the broader SPD ambition of contributing to a more future-proof society. This project is therefore not only a response to observed tensions, but also a manifestation of what strategic design can contribute to organisations seeking to transform responsibly and intentionally. The project brief initially set up for this thesis can be found in Appendix 1.

## II. Executive summary



Brands are increasingly confronted with complex and interrelated pressures, including generational value shifts, heightened demands for transparency and accountability, sustainability imperatives, and rapidly changing cultural expectations. While many organisations recognise the need for transformation, they often struggle to translate abstract ambitions, such as authenticity, responsibility, or purpose, into coherent and actionable brand strategies that are meaningfully embedded in organisational practice. This thesis addresses that gap by reframing brand transformation as a learnable organisational capability rather than a one-off strategic exercise.

This graduation project introduces Transformative Branding, a design-driven approach that conceptualises brand transformation through the lens of dynamic capabilities, specifically sensing, seizing, and transforming. By integrating insights from branding theory, organisational change, responsible design thinking, and generational research, Transformative Branding positions branding as an ongoing process of alignment between organisational vision, internal culture, and external image. Misalignments between these dimensions are treated not as failures, but as productive tensions that can signal opportunities for meaningful transformation.

The research phase combined an extensive literature review to establish a robust theoretical foundation. Key frameworks, including the Vision–Culture–Image (V–C–I) model and dynamic capability theory, were synthesised into a coherent conceptual model that explains how brands can navigate cultural and societal change in an authentic and responsible manner. Particular attention was given to the role of generational transitions, most notably the shift from Millennials to Generation Z and Generation Alpha, as a catalyst for increased scrutiny of brand behaviour, values, and credibility.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the project translated Transformative Branding into a practical workshop format designed to support organisations in developing this capability in practice. The resulting Transformative Branding workshop is a structured, participatory method that guides multidisciplinary brand teams through three phases:

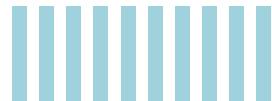
1. Sensing organisational tensions by mapping misalignments between vision, culture, and image;
2. Seizing these tensions as opportunity spaces for strategic reorientation;
3. Transforming insights into actionable directions, principles, and roadmaps.

The workshop was developed through iterative design cycles and tested across multiple organisational contexts, including consultancy and hospitality settings. These tests informed refinements to the workshop structure, facilitation approach, visual tools, and supporting materials. The final outcome consists of a complete workshop toolkit, including canvases, posters, and a facilitator handbook that enables independent facilitation and adaptation across contexts.

The findings indicate that Transformative Branding can function as an effective bridge between strategic intent and lived organisational reality. Rather than prescribing solutions, the workshop harbours collective sensemaking, ownership, and agency among participants. In doing so, it supports organisations in moving beyond superficial rebranding efforts toward deeper, structurally embedded transformation.

This thesis contributes to both theory and practice. Academically, it operationalises dynamic capability theory within the branding domain and demonstrates how design research can translate abstract frameworks into actionable methods. Practically, it provides strategic designers and organisations with a concrete, transferable approach to teaching and developing brand transformation capabilities. While further validation through longitudinal and large-scale testing is recommended, the work establishes Transformative Branding as a viable and scalable foundation for responsible brand transformation in complex and evolving contexts.

### III. Visual summary

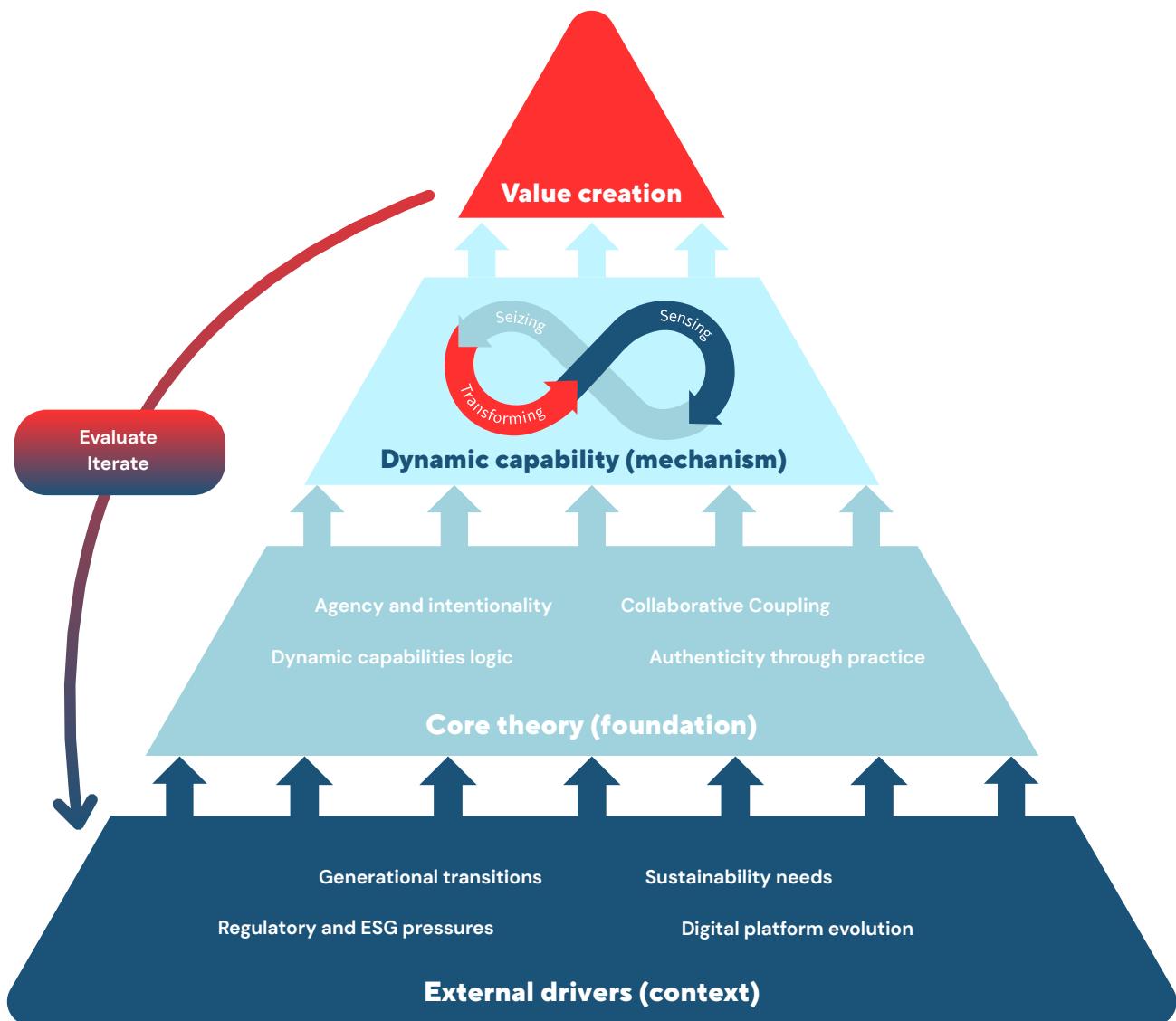


This visual summary synthesises the project's context, theoretical foundation, design process, and resulting Transformative Branding method and toolkit.

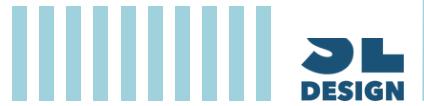
Modern day brands increasingly struggle to remain culturally relevant as generational values, expectations, and definitions of authenticity shift faster than traditional brand strategies can adapt. At the same time, organisations face growing regulatory, sustainability, and transparency pressures that demand substantive change rather than symbolic communication. This project positions Transformative Branding as a design-driven dynamic capability that enables organisations to intentionally evolve in response to these conditions.

Building on dynamic capabilities theory (Teece et al, 1997) , Transformative Branding operates through a continuous cycle of sensing, seizing, and transforming. Sensing focuses on developing cultural intelligence: understanding generational worldviews, stakeholder expectations, and emerging tensions between what organisations claim (vision), how they operate (culture), and how they are perceived (image). Seizing translates these insights into shared strategic direction through collaborative interpretation, co-creation, and prioritisation. Transforming embeds change through organisational learning, experimentation, and adaptive governance, ensuring that values are enacted in practice rather than communicated superficially.

Rather than treating authenticity as a fixed brand attribute, this framework conceptualises authenticity as an outcome of practice. Through repeated cycles of sensing, seizing, and transforming, organisations build the capacity to remain legitimate, trustworthy, and socially relevant over time. The pyramid visualises how external drivers, such as generational transitions, ESG regulation, digital platform dynamics, and sustainability challenges, feed into this capability, resulting in long-term value creation, organisational resilience, and societal impact.



# III. Visual summary



To operationalise Transformative Branding as a learnable capability, this project translates theory into a structured design method. The method was developed to be accessible to non-experts while retaining analytical rigor, enabling cross-functional brand teams to engage meaningfully with complex strategic challenges.

Central to the method is Vision–Culture–Image (V–C–I) mapping (Hatch & Schultz, 2001), which structures the sensing phase by making misalignments explicit. Individual reflection precedes group discussion to reduce hierarchy effects and surface tacit knowledge before it is filtered by group dynamics. By sequencing activities from reflection to collective sensemaking, the method supports psychological safety, shared ownership, and deeper insight generation. This ensures that generational tensions are not immediately solved, but first understood. The method is embodied in a facilitated workshop toolkit designed to teach Transformative Branding through practice. The workshop guides participants through the full sensing–seizing–transforming cycle using canvases, visual models, and collaborative exercises.

During seizing, mixed-expertise groups interpret prioritised tension fields and explore strategic directions without jumping prematurely to solutions. In the transforming phase, insights are translated into a shared, time-bound transformation roadmap that identifies goals, sequencing, and enabling conditions. Reflection and follow-up are embedded to reinforce learning and sustain momentum beyond the session. Together, the method and toolkit demonstrate how Transformative Branding can function not as a static framework, but as an organisational capability that helps brands evolve alongside new generations in an authentic, responsible, and future-oriented way.

## Opening & framing the session

**Purpose:** establish safety, prepare participants cognitively, and frame the workshop in accessible terms.

**Activity structure:** warm welcome + explanation of purpose, introductions (name, age, role, years of experience, warm-up question), emphasis on no right or wrong answers and equal contribution.

**Design choices:** use plain, non-theoretical language to avoid early cognitive overload, Facilitator models openness and vulnerability to reduce hierarchy barriers, Start with predictable, low-effort interactions to ease participants into the process.

**Design rationale:** a slower, guided opening helps participants feel safe, reduces social filtering, and prepares them for honest introspection

## Sensing phase – surface tensions using V–C–I mapping

**Purpose:** reveal misalignments between Vision, Culture, and Image; make tacit knowledge explicit.

**Activity structure:** individual reflections, group clustering into Vision / Culture / Image, collective identification of tensions, prioritisation of tensions.

**Design choices:** individual reflections first to minimise hierarchy effects and surface private insights, democratic prioritisation of tensions to reinforce shared ownership.

**Design rationale:** jumping directly into discussion produced filtered, shallow input. Individual reflection captures richer lived experience before group dynamics interfere. V–C–I mapping structures the sensing phase rigorously and visibly.

## Theoretical explanation

**Purpose:** make Transformative Branding understandable without overwhelming participants.

**Activity structure:** timed explanation of sensing–seizing–transforming, visual explanation instead of dense text, examples from familiar brands, emphasis that no expertise is required to participate.

**Design choices:** keep theory brief to maintain cognitive manageability, use visuals and relatable examples to increase comprehension, deliver theory right before application to strengthen retention.

**Design rationale:** to cultivate Transformative Branding as a dynamic capability, participants must grasp its core logic. However, Responsible Design Thinking demands accessibility: theory should enable participation, not intimidate.

## Seizing phase – prioritising and interpreting tensions

**Purpose:** deepen understanding of selected tension fields and ideate on potential responses.

**Activity structure:** create mixed-expertise groups, group ideation on selected tensions, presentations of insights and proposed directions.

**Design choices:** mixed groups break silos and introduce cognitive diversity, short structured canvases guide exploration without solution jumping, presentations enable cross-pollination and collective sensemaking.

**Design rationale:** transformative Branding requires interpreting sensed tensions as opportunities for strategic action. Structured group work balances creativity with analytical thinking, strengthening the seizing capability.

## Ending & consolidation

**Purpose:** close with clarity, shared understanding, and reflection.

**Activity structure:** each participant shares reflections and takeaways, facilitator summarises outputs, outline next steps and follow-up actions.

**Design choices:** provide a concise summary of outputs to reduce ambiguity, include both spoken and optional written reflection for inclusivity, clarify next steps to ensure continuity after the workshop.

**Design rationale:** the end of the workshop is key for meaning-making and commitment. Reflection enhances psychological ownership, while clear next steps maintain organisational legitimacy and momentum.

## Transforming phase – translate tensions into action

**Purpose:** create an actionable transformation timeline with identified barriers and enablers.

**Activity structure:** collective timeline creation: goals, sequencing, steps, identify barriers and enablers, consolidate roadmap.

**Design choices:** introduce barriers/enablers only after goals are set to avoid pessimism dominating early thinking, scaffold strategic thinking with sequential facilitator questions, use a physical timeline to support collaborative sensemaking.

**Design rationale:** this phase ensures that identified tensions translate into actionable outcomes, by translating insights into actionable, time-bound pathways. It also reinforces Transformative Branding as a dynamic capability, capable of bridging sensing → seizing → transforming in one coherent flow.

# Table of contents



I	Preface
II	Executive summary
III	Visual summary
<b>02</b>	Introduction
<b>03</b>	Reading guide
<b>06</b>	Chapter 1: Transformative Branding Theory
<b>27</b>	Chapter 2: Drivers of change
<b>44</b>	Chapter 3: The strategic value of Transformative Branding
<b>58</b>	Chapter 4: Transformative Branding workshop
<b>90</b>	Chapter 5: Recommendations and implications
<b>96</b>	Reflection
<b>98</b>	References
<b>103</b>	Artificial Intelligence usage
<b>105</b>	Appendix

Brands today operate under an intensifying convergence of pressures. Sustainability regulation and investor scrutiny are intensifying, public digital platforms continuously verify and contest corporate claims, and a generational handover, from Millennials to Generation Z and Generation Alpha, is reshaping expectations around values, transparency, and participation. In this context, what were once considered differentiators have become baseline requirements. Brand claims are no longer judged by persuasive messaging alone but by their consistency with observable organisational behaviour. Traditional brand management approaches, largely optimised for image control, message consistency, and campaign-based communication, are increasingly ill-equipped for this environment. While effective in more stable contexts, these approaches tend to externalise branding as a communicative layer rather than embedding it within organisational practice. As a result, they frequently produce projection-reality gaps: misalignments between what brands promise and what stakeholders experience. These gaps are now rapidly surfaced, amplified, and penalised by digitally networked audiences, undermining trust, legitimacy, and long-term value creation. Leading to the research question: how brands can respond to the emerging generational shifts to authentically and sustainably transform their brand, through Transformative Branding?

This thesis advances Transformative Branding as a response to this challenge. Transformative Branding is positioned not as a communication strategy, but as a dynamic organisational capability: the capacity of a brand to continuously sense shifts in social culture, regulation, technology, and stakeholder expectations; to seize opportunities through collaborative coupling with employees, creators, communities, NGOs, and partners; and to transform organisational practices so that purpose is operationally embodied rather than symbolically communicated. Framed in this way, the brand moves beyond being a representational asset and becomes a learning, reconfiguring system embedded in governance, strategy, and everyday decision-making.

The need for such a capability is driven by a set of intertwined shifts that fundamentally alter how brands are evaluated and trusted. First, value orientation has moved from lifestyle fit toward ethical and societal positioning. While Millennials were often associated with the experience economy and identity expression, Generation Z and Generation Alpha place greater emphasis on authenticity, inclusivity, transparency, and sustainability. Second, brand communication has shifted from broadcast storytelling toward dialogical and co-created meaning-making, in which creators, communities, and employees play an active role in shaping brand narratives. Third, expectations have evolved from convenience toward personalisation and seamlessness, with younger cohorts anticipating adaptive, participatory, and often gamified brand experiences. Fourth, the basis of trust has shifted from peer endorsement toward community validation and credible practice, privileging visible commitment and accountability over abstract claims. Finally, especially for Generation Alpha, brands increasingly operate within immersive, hybrid ecosystems in which digital and physical experiences are tightly interwoven through technologies such as AI, AR, and platform-based interaction.

Together, these shifts generate persistent organisational tensions, between promise and proof, heritage and future relevance, speed and responsibility, that cannot be resolved through messaging alone. Addressing them requires brands to change how they operate, govern, and learn. Branding, in this sense, becomes inseparable from organisational transformation.

This thesis structures its research contribution in three parts. Chapter 1 develops the conceptual foundation of Transformative Branding by synthesising insights from branding theory, sustainability studies, design and innovation literature, and organisational theory. This synthesis results in four core pillars (agency and intentionality, dynamic capabilities logic, collaborative coupling, and authenticity-through-practice) culminating in a formal definition and conceptual model. Chapter 2 examines the external drivers that render Transformative Branding operationally necessary, including generational value shifts, regulatory and ESG intensification, digital platform and creator-economy dynamics, and sustainability as an innovation catalyst, illustrated through contrasting cases. Chapter 3 connects these drivers to organisational mechanisms and outcomes through a Driver-Mechanism-Outcome logic, demonstrating how practices such as co-creation, continuous learning, and embodied authenticity contribute to intergenerational trust, adaptability, risk reduction, and sustained relevance.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, this thesis translates Transformative Branding into practice through the development of a workshop-based toolkit (Chapter 4). This toolkit is designed to rehearse sensing-seizing-transforming routines within organisations, support alignment between governance, operations, and stated purpose, and enable transparent navigation of heritage-future trade-offs. In doing so, the thesis reframes branding from a promise to be communicated into a practice to be enacted, offering organisations a structured pathway toward credible and durable transformation in an era where stakeholders can, and will, verify whether brands truly live up to their claims. Finally, in Chapter 5, further recommendations and this thesis' implications are highlighted.

Below you find all abbreviations and key terms used throughout the thesis, each accompanied by a concise explanation.

## Core concepts

TB – Transformative Branding: A dynamic organisational capability enabling brands to sense environmental and cultural shifts, seize transformation opportunities, and transform operations in alignment with purpose (Spry, Pappu & Cornwell, 2021; Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997).

## Sustainability & Governance terms

- ESG – Environmental, Social, and Governance: A performance framework evaluating environmental responsibility, social impact, and governance quality. Strong ESG performance is empirically linked to financial resilience and long-term value creation (Aydoğmuş et al., 2022; Clark, Feiner & Viehs, 2015).
- NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation: Independent civil-society organisations that influence sustainability, ethics, or social policy. Often appear as co-creation or accountability partners in Transformative Branding (Ind, 2003; Westley et al., 2014).
- CSRD – Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive: EU legislation mandating standardised, third party-assured sustainability reporting (Deloitte, 2025). (Indirectly referenced in ch. 2.2 via regulatory discussion.)
- CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility: Traditional model of organisational ethics and social responsibility. Criticised for being communication-heavy, compliance-driven, and insufficiently transformative (Maon, Swaen & Lindgreen, 2015; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Carroll, 1991).
- Scope 1-3 emissions: Categories of greenhouse gas emissions used in sustainability reporting. Often referenced in regulatory frameworks and ESG practices (Aydoğmuş et al., 2022; Deloitte, 2025).

## Generational terms

- Millennials: Cohort born roughly 1981–1996, associated with lifestyle-driven consumption and the experience economy (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Twenge, 2017).
- Gen Z – Generation Z: Born 1997–2012, characterised by authenticity-seeking, diversity expectations, verification behaviour, and digital-first orientation (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Twenge, 2017; Witt & Baird, 2018).
- Gen Alpha – Generation Alpha: Born 2013–2025; the first fully AI-native cohort. Expected to demonstrate hybrid digital-physical identity formation and algorithm-infused value systems (Ind, 2021; Jha, 2020; Ziatdinov & Cilliers, 2022).
- iGen – Alternative name for Gen Z (Twenge, 2017): Used to highlight psychological and behavioural effects of high digital exposure.
- Generational cohort theory: Framework explaining how shared formative events shape cohort identity (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Parry & Urwin, 2011).

## Branding & organisational theory terms

- Dynamic capabilities: Higher-order organisational abilities to sense opportunities, seize them, and transform in response to change (Teece, 2007; Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997).
  - Sensing / Seizing / Transforming: The three capability clusters structuring Transformative Branding (Teece, 2007; 2017).
- Co-creation: Interactive value creation between organisations and stakeholders (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2014). Foundational for stakeholder involvement in Transformative Branding.
- Collaborative coupling: Spry et al.'s (2021) concept describing distributed authorship between brands and stakeholders.
- Authenticity through practice: Beverland's argument that authenticity emerges from demonstrated behaviour, not symbolic messaging (Beverland, 2005; 2008; 2009; Beverland & Farrelly, 2009).
- Organisational identity alignment: Coherence between internal organisational culture, strategic vision, and external image (Hatch & Schultz, 2001).
- Service-Dominant logic (S-D Logic): Marketing logic positing that value is always co-created among actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2014).
- V-C-I Alignment – Vision–Culture–Image: A strategic alignment model connecting internal organisational culture, strategic vision, and external image (Hatch & Schultz, 2001).

## Digital culture & platform terms

- Creator economy: Digital ecosystem where individual creators shape social culture, influence purchasing, and co-author brand meaning (Abidin, 2016; Green & Jenkins, 2011).
- Cultural citizenship: Brands earning legitimacy through ongoing, authentic participation in cultural contexts (Holt, 2002, 2016; Witt & Baird, 2018).
- Omnichannel: Seamless integration of online and offline experiences; increasingly a baseline expectation for Gen Z (NIQ, 2024).
- Social listening: Systematic monitoring of digital conversations to identify cultural trends and stakeholder concerns (Holt, 2016; Witt & Baird, 2018).

## Sustainability & innovation terms

- Circular economy: Design and business philosophy aimed at minimising waste and retaining material value. Appears in sustainability transformation literature (Nidumolu, Prahalad & Rangaswami, 2009).
- Lifecycle Assessment (LCA): Method to measure environmental impact across a product's full lifecycle (Nidumolu et al., 2009; Golob et al., 2022).
- Decarbonisation: Reducing carbon emissions across operational and supply chain activities (Aydoğmuş et al., 2022; Deloitte, 2025).
- Dynamic learning: Continuous organisational adaptation through feedback, experimentation, and revision of assumptions (Argyris & Schön, 1997; Golob et al., 2022).

## Design & research methodology terms

- Design thinking: Human-centred innovation approach emphasizing empathy, ideation, and experimentation (Brown, 2008).
- Participatory design: Collaborative process enabling non-experts to contribute meaningfully to design work (Sanders & Stappers, 2008; 2014).
- Iterative prototyping: Cycle of testing and refining to improve solutions (Wagemans & Xu, 2021; Sanders & Stappers, 2014).
- Purposeful sampling: Selecting research sites based on their informational richness rather than representativeness (Patton, 2015).

## Brand transformation terms

- Projection-reality gap: Mismatch between communicated brand identity and actual practices (Beverland, 2008; Morsing & Schultz, 2006).
- Greenwashing: Overstated or misleading sustainability claims (Vredenburg et al., 2020).
- Paradigm-challenging leadership: Leadership that confronts dominant norms and catalyses cultural change (Spry et al., 2021; Holt, 2002).

# Chapter 1: Transformative Branding theory

Traditional brand management has historically emphasised consistency, control, and reputational management (Schultz et al., 2013). Brands operated as managerial assets whose meaning was authored centrally, communicated through controlled channels, and defended against unauthorised interpretations. This model assumed that value derived from unified, stable brand identities carefully curated by marketing professionals.

However, this approach has become increasingly inadequate. Radical transparency enabled by digital technologies, the rise of participatory stakeholders, and the urgency of wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) such as climate change and social injustice demand new approaches. Transformative Branding reconceptualises the brand as a dynamic capability, able to sense societal shifts, seize opportunities for purposeful intervention, and transform practices in dialogue with stakeholders. This redefines the brand's role from symbolic representation to active system of change.

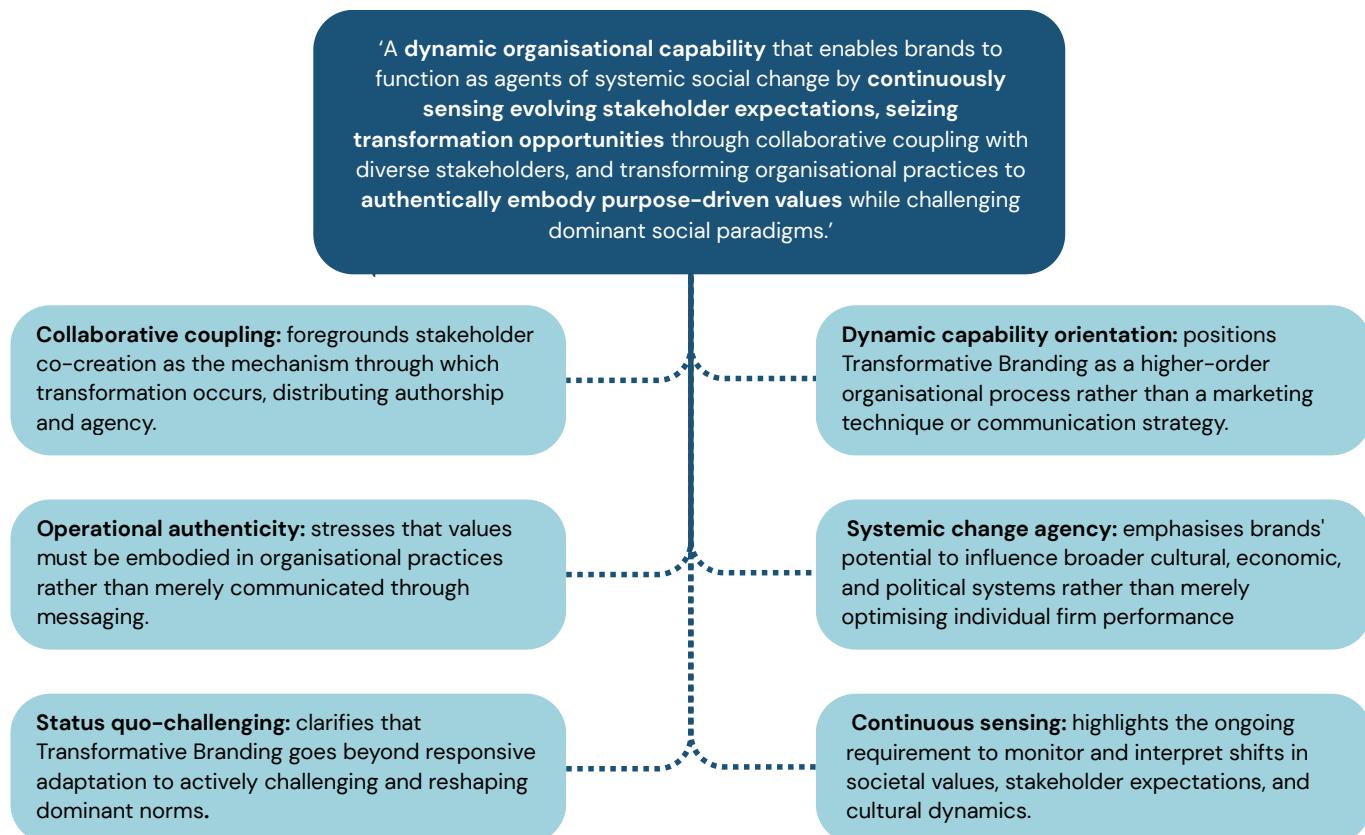
## 1.1 Definition and conceptual model

This section synthesises the theoretical foundations, critiques, core pillars, design foundations, and dynamic capability framework into a comprehensive definition and visual conceptual model of Transformative Branding.

### Working definition

Based on the theoretical streams reviewed in this chapter, Transformative Branding is formally defined as follows, integrating several key elements seen in Figure 1, these will be explained and theoretically grounded in this chapter.

Figure 1

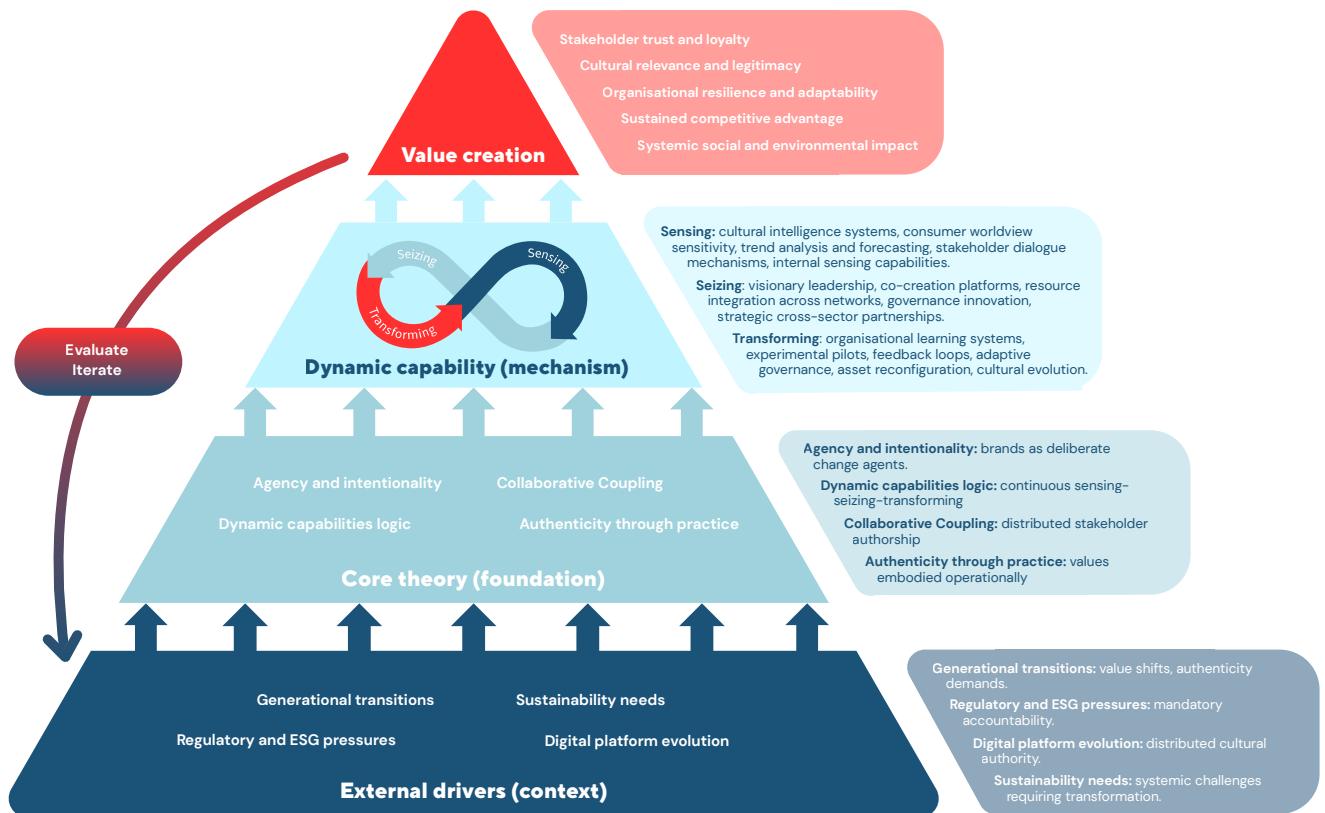


Definition and key elements of Transformative Branding.

## Conceptual model: Transformative Branding as dynamic capability

The conceptual model visualises Transformative Branding as an integrated system with four layers seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2

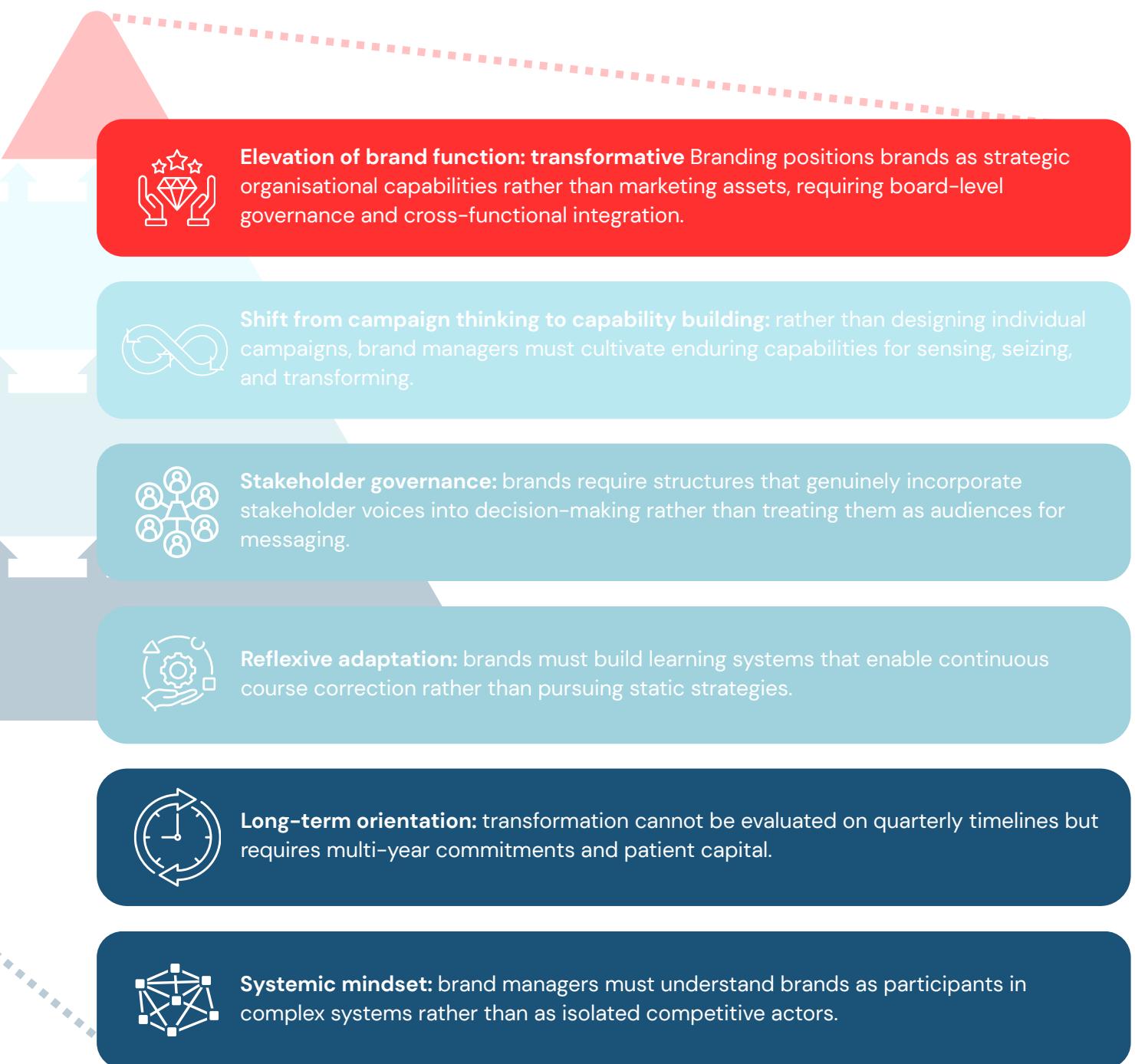


The visualised layered conceptual model of Transformative Branding.

The foundational layer highlights external drivers, explored comprehensively in Chapter 2, create the contextual conditions that make Transformative Branding necessary rather than optional. The pillars on the second layer provide the conceptual foundation that distinguishes Transformative Branding from traditional approaches. The microfoundations on the third level operationalise the framework, specifying how brands develop and deploy transformative capabilities. And finally, the outcomes at the top, explored in detail in Chapter 3, demonstrate the strategic value generated when brands successfully develop transformative capabilities. The model operates as a feedback system. External drivers create pressures that require dynamic capabilities. These capabilities, grounded in core theoretical pillars and enacted through specific microfoundations, generate strategic outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, influence external contexts (e.g., successful transformation by pioneering brands raises stakeholder expectations for other brands), creating an iterative cycle that continuously evolves.

This conceptual architecture has several implications for brand management practice per level of achievement in the Transformative Branding concept, seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3



*The brand management implications of Transformative Branding.*

## 1.2 Theoretical foundations and evolution

The intellectual origin of Transformative Branding can be traced through several interconnected theoretical streams: the transparency and integrity movement in branding, stakeholder co-creation theories, the integration of sustainability as strategic necessity, organisational identity alignment, and cultural strategy. Each stream contributes essential concepts that, when synthesised, constitute the theoretical architecture of Transformative Branding. Design theory plays a critical mediating role in this framework, translating abstract organisational capabilities into participatory, actionable practices that can be enacted within complex, multi-stakeholder settings.

### From image control to stakeholder co-creation

An early and influential articulation of the shift toward transparency and distributed authorship appears in Ind's (2003) edited volume *Beyond Branding*. Ind and his contributors argued that the traditional "closed" model of branding, where companies controlled meaning through managed messaging, had become fundamentally unjustified in an era of heightened scrutiny and distributed communication technologies. The book positioned transparency and integrity not as ethical luxuries but as operational necessities for brand survival.

Particularly predictive was Kitchin's chapter on brand sustainability (2003, pp. 69–86), which introduced the concept of brand sustainability as an existential capability. Kitchin argued that brands failing to adapt to evolving societal expectations around ethics and environmental responsibility would become obsolete, not gradually but catastrophically. This early work anticipated modern-day debates on greenwashing and authenticity by positioning sustainability as a fundamental dimension of brand viability rather than a supplementary marketing tactic. Meyers' contribution (2003) raised the provocative question: whose brand is it? His answer challenged the foundational logic of traditional brand management by asserting that brands are co-owned by consumers, employees, activists, and society at large. This distributed ownership model foreshadowed the collaborative coupling concept later formalized by Spry et al. (2021), emphasising that brands can no longer unilaterally dictate their meaning but must negotiate it through ongoing stakeholder dialogue.

The theoretical grounding for this participatory shift is provided by Vargo and Lusch's (2014) service-dominant (S-D) logic, which reframed value creation as inherently collaborative rather than firm-driven. S-D logic proposes that value is not produced by organisations and subsequently consumed by customers but instead emerges through interactive processes of resource integration among multiple actors.

Its core principles, that value is phenomenologically determined by beneficiaries, that all economic actors function as resource integrators, and that customers are always co-creators of value, directly challenge traditional brand management's emphasis on managerial authorship, message control, and the notion of brands as static bundles of meaning. From an S-D logic perspective, brands become service platforms that facilitate coordination, communication, and collective value creation among diverse stakeholders. Transformative Branding operationalises this shift by treating brands as dynamic catalysts through which economic and social value are co-created. Mitchell's (2003) critique of "brand narcissism" in *Beyond Branding* captures this tension, arguing that brands' obsession with self-referential image management was incompatible with the networked, participatory nature of modern-day culture. Transformative Branding responds to this challenge by embracing distributed authorship as a source of legitimacy rather than treating it as a threat to brand integrity.

## Organizational identity and internal-external-alignment

A second critical foundation for Transformative Branding lies in the alignment between organisational identity and external brand expression. Hatch and Schultz (2001) proposed an integrated framework linking organisational culture, identity, and image, arguing that brand sustainability requires coherence across these three dimensions. Their work emphasised that internal authenticity serves as a prerequisite for external credibility, a theme that resonates powerfully with modern-day concerns about greenwashing and performative activism.

This insight has great implications for Transformative Branding. In contexts where employees function as co-creators and brand ambassadors, any disconnect between internal organisational reality and external brand communication becomes a liability. Ind's later work (2021) on Generation Alpha reinforces this point, demonstrating that younger workers and consumers possess heightened sensitivity to inconsistencies between what brands say and their organisational practice. For these cohorts, internal authenticity has evolved from a desirable attribute to a competitive necessity. The organisational identity literature also highlights the iterative relationship between organisational culture and brand. While traditional brand management often treated this culture as a backdrop to be managed or overcome, Hatch and Schultz demonstrate that the culture actively shapes brand identity from within. Transformative Branding leverages this insight by treating organisational culture not as a constraint but as a resource, working with social cultures that embody the values and practices brands seek to project externally.

## Cultural strategy and Meaning-Making

A third theoretical pillar emerges from Holt's (2016) social cultural strategy framework, which distinguishes between traditional branding rooted in myth-making and modern-day expectations for brands to engage authentically with social realities. Holt argued that iconic brands historically succeeded by crafting identity myths, compelling narratives that resolved cultural anxieties and enabled consumers to construct aspirational identities. However, in an era characterised by radical transparency and participatory media, such top-down mythologizing increasingly encounters skepticism.

Holt's earlier work (2002) on brands as cultural resources provides additional theoretical grounding. He conceptualised iconic brands not as superior marketing constructions but as cultural artefacts that embody and help society navigate cultural contradictions. Iconic status emerges not through advertising excellence but through brands' capacity to engage meaningfully with tensions between individual freedom and social conformity, material consumption and spiritual authenticity, or progress and tradition.

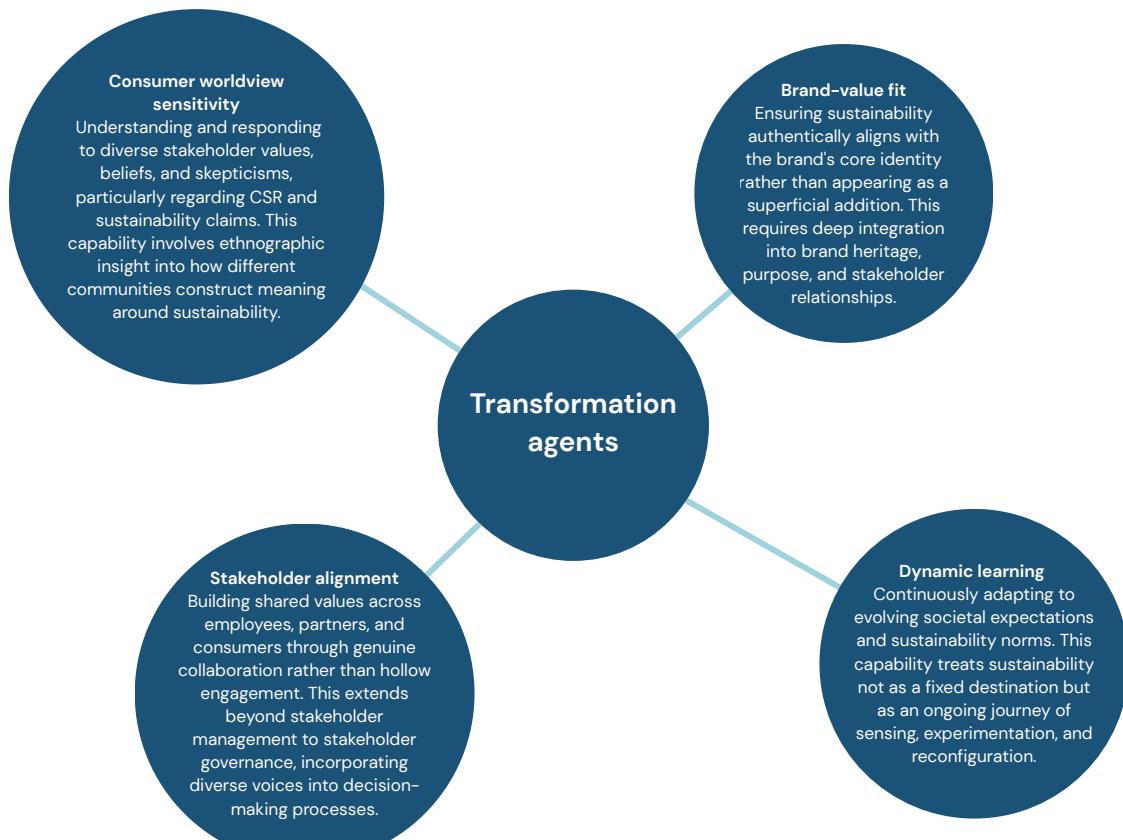
Transformative Branding responds to Holt's critique by shifting from myth creation to cultural participation. Rather than attempting to engineer cultural meaning from above, transformative brands position themselves as facilitators within ongoing cultural conversations. This requires what Holt terms "cultural strategy": the capacity to sense cultural opportunities, understand subcultural dynamics, and intervene in ways that feel organic rather than manufactured.

This cultural participation model aligns with the distributed authorship emphasis in stakeholder co-creation theory. Brands cannot control cultural meaning in networked environments where consumers, employees, activists, and communities continuously reinterpret and redistribute brand messages. Instead, brands must develop capabilities for sensing cultural currents, engaging respectfully with diverse communities, and contributing value to cultural conversations without attempting to dominate them.

## Sustainability as theoretical necessity

The integration of sustainability into branding theory marks a pivotal evolution in conceptualising brands' relationship with society and the environment. This shift repositions sustainability from a mere CSR concern to a core dimension of brand identity and organisational capability. Golob et al. (2022) formalised this evolution through their capability's framework for brand sustainability, identifying four core capabilities necessary for brands to function as transformation agents (Figure 4).

Figure 4



Overview of transformation agents identified by Golob et al. (2022).

These capabilities represent an integration of earlier insights from Kitchin (2003) on brand sustainability as existential necessity, Teece's (1997) dynamic capabilities framework (will be introduced in Chapter 1.5), and stakeholder theory. Critically, Golob et al. (2022) emphasise that these capabilities are not discrete managerial techniques but interdependent competencies that must be developed completely. A brand cannot, for example, achieve authentic stakeholder alignment without dynamic learning capabilities that enable continuous adaptation to stakeholder feedback.

From a theoretical perspective, this framework positions sustainability not as an optional brand attribute but as a fundamental dimension of what it means to be a legitimate, future-oriented brand. The framework bridges individual brand management with systemic societal transitions, positioning brands as potential catalysts in broader sustainability transformations. This systemic orientation will become particularly important when examining the drivers (Chapter 2) that make sustainability not just conceptually important but operationally vital.

## 1.3 The structural limitations of traditional CSR and brand management

Despite decades of development, traditional CSR and brand management frameworks remain poorly equipped to meet the demands of today's transparency-driven, stakeholder-intensive environment. Across CSR implementation studies, communication models, hierarchical responsibility frameworks, and branding scholarship, a consistent pattern emerges: these approaches are structurally static, control-oriented, and communicative rather than operational. As a result, they generate legitimacy risks, innovation blind spots, and systemic misalignment with contemporary societal expectations.

### Traditional CSR: compliance and communication over transformation

Empirical research shows that traditional CSR is rarely integrated into core strategic or operational processes. Maon et al.'s (2015) multi-country study identifies five persistent gaps that characterise how organisations implement CSR:

- Strategic → peripheral: CSR is frequently positioned in stand-alone departments with little influence over the business model, culture, or decision-making structures. This marginality makes CSR vulnerable to budget cuts and limits its capacity to influence organisational behaviour.
- Compliance → innovation: Organisations tend to view CSR primarily as a compliance or risk-mitigation requirement rather than as a driver of value creation. This defensive stance restricts their ability to explore new business opportunities emerging from sustainability challenges.
- Top-down → co-created: CSR initiatives are typically designed by senior leadership with limited stakeholder involvement, creating what Maon et al. (2015) call legitimacy deficits: CSR appears imposed rather than collaboratively developed.
- Reporting → operational change: Many firms produce extensive sustainability communications while making modest operational changes, resulting in "marketing-operations gaps" where public commitments exceed internal practices.
- Short-term → long-term: CSR performance is often evaluated using short-term metrics that cannot capture the multi-year investments required for environmental and social impact.

These structural gaps make traditional CSR especially fragile in a context where discrepancies between stated intentions and lived practices are easily detected and widely shared.

### Carroll's CSR Pyramid: hierarchical and static limitations

Carroll's (1991) CSR pyramid has shaped traditional CSR thinking for over three decades, yet its hierarchical structure embeds assumptions that no longer hold in modern-day contexts. The model positions economic responsibilities as the foundation, followed sequentially by legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. This structure implicitly frames sustainability and social value as secondary, dependent on the organisation first achieving financial success.

Three developments challenge this logic:

- Empirical evidence contradicts the hierarchy. Extensive research (e.g., Clark et al., 2015; Aydoğmuş et al., 2022) demonstrates that strong ESG performance contributes to firm value, reduces risk, and improves long-term financial performance. Social and environmental action is not the apex of responsibility; it is part of economic resilience.
- Regulatory change has eliminated the voluntary nature of sustainability. Mandatory reporting regimes such as CSRD, ISSB, and SEC climate disclosures make sustainability integration a legal and strategic requirement, not a philanthropic choice.
- Younger generations treat values alignment as fundamental rather than discretionary. Research suggests that, compared to previous cohorts, Generation Z and Generation Alpha tends to increasingly evaluate organisations based on ethical conduct, transparency, and systemic impact. This reverses Carroll's logic: legitimacy is not earned after economic success; it is a prerequisite for engagement.

Because the pyramid treats responsibility as hierarchical and sequential, it fails to capture how modern-day legitimacy and organisational value are co-constructed across financial, ethical, environmental, and social domains simultaneously.

## Communicative CSR models limited by one-way or asymmetric engagement

Morsing and Schultz's (2006) influential framework highlights how most CSR communication strategies fail to achieve meaningful stakeholder involvement. Their three-level model distinguishes:

1. Information strategy: one-way communication that informs stakeholders without inviting dialogue.
2. Response strategy: two-way, but asymmetric: organisations invite feedback but do not redistribute decision-making authority.
3. Involvement strategy: two-way symmetric communication grounded in co-creation and shared authorship.

Most organisations remain stuck in the first two strategies, where communication is constructed to maintain managerial control rather than genuine involvement. This creates three major vulnerabilities:

- Legitimacy deficits, as CSR appears disconnected from stakeholder values and lived experiences.
- Innovation blind spots, because organisations overlook insights, needs, or tensions that stakeholders could surface through involvement.
- Crisis fragility, since the absence of trust-based relationships makes it difficult to mobilise stakeholders during controversies or reputational threats.

In today's digital ecosystem, where employees, activists, and consumers routinely disclose internal contradictions on open platforms, one-way or asymmetric CSR communication is increasingly incompatible with stakeholder expectations of transparency and accountability. It doesn't merely become ineffective, but potentially even counterproductive.

## Traditional Branding: consistency, firm-centric, short-term

Beyond CSR-specific limitations, traditional brand management frameworks are built on assumptions of control, uniformity, and perception management. These assumptions are increasingly untenable.

- Consistency as rigidity: While coherence remains important, traditional branding's emphasis on strict consistency limits an organisation's ability to evolve with changing cultural norms. Beverland & Farrelly (2009) demonstrates that authenticity is not a static trait, but a judgment continually renegotiated based on performance, behaviour, and responsiveness. Consistency without adaptation can undermine legitimacy.
- Competitive, firm-centric logic: Traditional branding emphasises differentiation and competition, which becomes counterproductive in the context of systemic issues such as climate change or supply chain ethics. Spry et al. (2021) show that value creation increasingly depends on cross-sector collaboration, something competitive positioning frameworks struggle to accommodate.
- Short-term measurement bias: Brand performance is commonly judged through metrics tied to short-term outcomes (sales, brand equity scores, market share). These metrics undervalue long-term cultural alignment, stakeholder trust, and systemic contributions. This bias perpetuates reactive rather than transformative behaviour.

## Summarizing

Across CSR implementation, communication, responsibility frameworks, and branding theory, a single conclusion emerges:

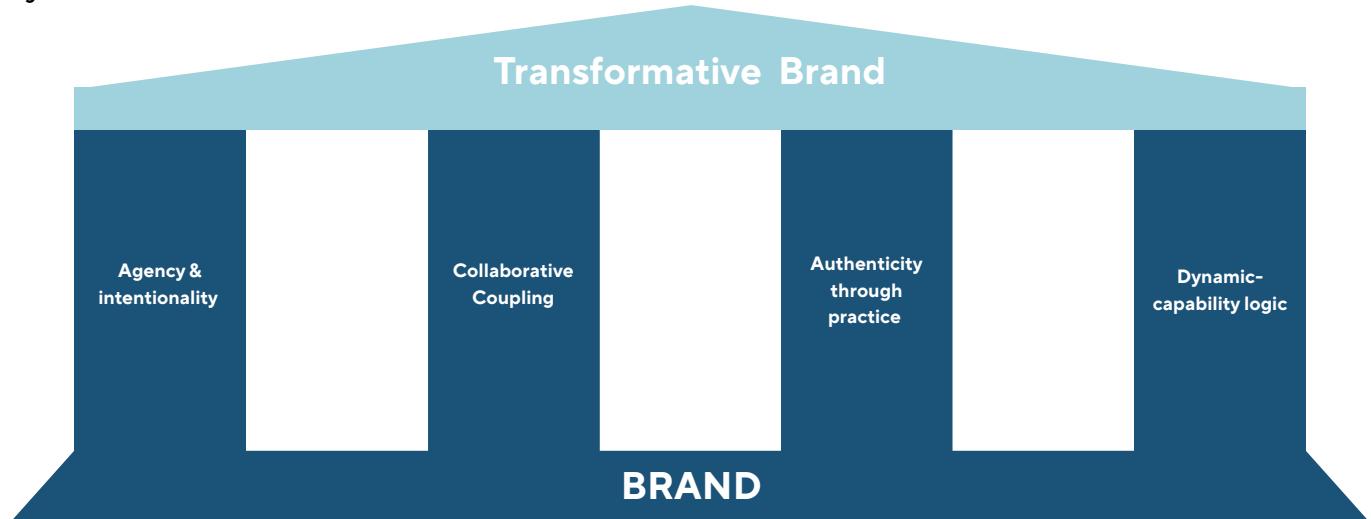
*Traditional CSR and branding approaches rely on control, communication, hierarchy, and short-termism, assumptions that no longer align with a world defined by transparency, stakeholder empowerment, digital amplification, and shifting generational expectations.*

These models were designed for a different era, in which organisations controlled information flows, defined brand meaning unilaterally, and treated responsibility as discretionary. Today, these assumptions generate risk rather than legitimacy.

## 1.4 Core pillars of Transformative Branding

Having established Transformative Branding's theoretical lineage and critiqued traditional approaches' limitations, this section articulates the four foundational dimensions that distinguish Transformative Branding as a conceptual framework (Figure 5). Importantly, these pillars do not function independently: collaborative coupling strengthens sensing accuracy, authenticity through practice stabilises transformation outcomes, and agency and intentionality determine how far brands are willing to challenge existing institutional norms.

Figure 5



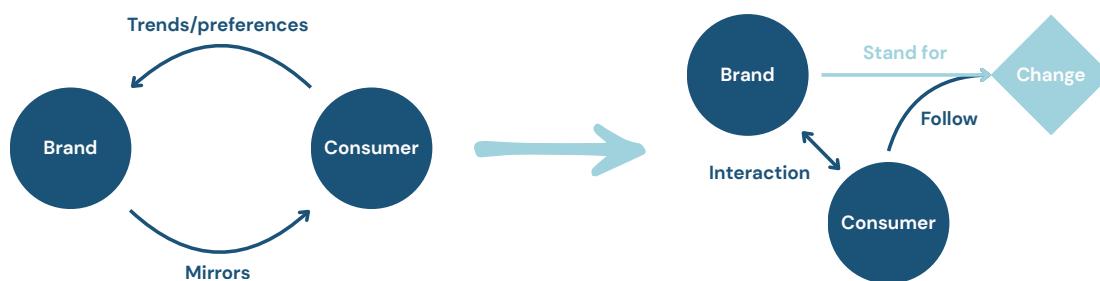
The four theoretical pillars of the conceptual framework of Transformative Branding.

### Agency and Intentionality: brands as deliberate change agents

The first pillar positions brands as possessing agency and intentionality rather than passively reflecting market demands or cultural norms. Spry et al. (2021) articulate this most clearly, conceptualising Transformative Branding as a dynamic capability enabling brands to actively challenge dominant social paradigms rather than merely adapting to them. This represents a fundamental departure from traditional brand management's responsive posture. Rather than treating brands as mirrors reflecting consumer preferences or cultural trends, Transformative Branding positions them as actors with the capacity to shape consumption norms, influence cultural discourse, and catalyse collective action toward social and environmental goals (Figure 6). This agency manifests through what Spry et al. (2021) term "paradigm-challenging leadership": the willingness to take positions on contested issues, advocate for structural reforms, and mobilise stakeholders around shared visions of alternative futures.

However, agency comes with accountability. Brands that claim transformative intent must deliver substantive impact, not merely activist talk. Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) distinction between authentic activism and "woke washing" highlights the risks. Authentic agency requires alignment across purpose, values, messaging, and practice. Inauthentic agency, high messaging without corresponding operational change, generates backlash and undermines trust.

Figure 6



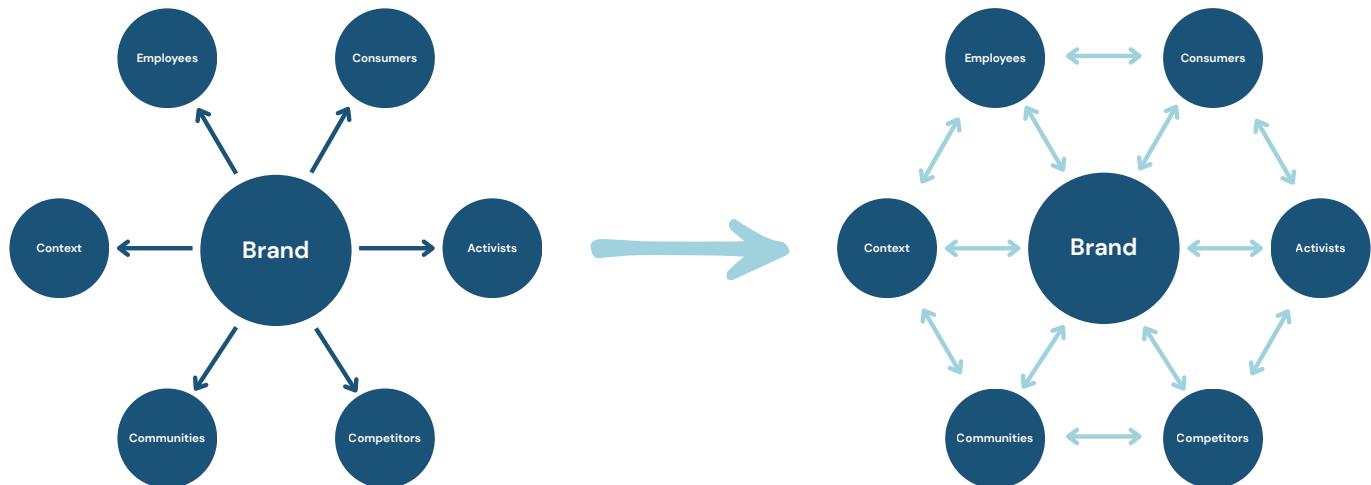
The change of roles of brands in Transformative brand management.

## Collaborative coupling: distributed authorship across stakeholders

The second pillar emphasises collaborative coupling as the mechanism through which transformative brands engage stakeholders. This concept, also developed by Spry et al. (2021), captures the necessity of connecting organisational vision and resources with stakeholder networks to co-create value. Collaborative coupling distributes brand authorship across employees, consumers, activists, communities, and even competitors (Figure 7). Leadership remains essential, but its function shifts from directive control to facilitative enabling. Leaders articulate shared long-term visions, that are created together, and create structures that enable diverse voices to contribute meaningfully while maintaining coherence around shared purposes.

This distributed authorship model has several implications. First, it requires governance structures that incorporate stakeholder voices into decision-making, moving beyond consultation to genuine co-governance. Second, it demands transparency about trade-offs and limitations, acknowledging that stakeholder interests may conflict and perfect alignment is unattainable. Third, it positions conflict and tension as productive forces rather than problems to eliminate, recognising that negotiating contradictions can strengthen relationships and generate innovation. Collaborative coupling also extends Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) DART framework (Dialogue, Access, Risk assessment, Transparency, explained fully later in the chapter) beyond customer co-creation to multi-stakeholder engagement. It recognises that employees, communities, activists, NGOs, and even competitors possess knowledge, capabilities, and legitimacy essential for achieving transformative outcomes.

Figure 7



*The change in stakeholder roles, from dictatorship to distributed authorship.*

## Authenticity through practice: values embodied, not merely communicated

The third pillar positions authenticity as emerging from embodied organisational practice rather than strategic communication. Beverland's extensive research (2005, 2008, 2009) establishes that authenticity cannot be manufactured through superficial signals or messaging strategies. Instead, it emerges from consistent alignment between values and organisational behaviour across multiple dimensions over time. Beverland's (2009) seven habits of iconic brands, heritage and tradition, sincerity, commitment to quality, integrity, symbolism, nostalgia, and being original, emphasise that authentic brands are those whose external expressions align with internal realities. This distinction proves critical for Transformative Branding. While traditional branding often treats authenticity as a communication strategy, a message to be projected, Transformative Branding treats it as an organisational practice, a way of being that must be part of decision-making, stakeholder relationships, and operational commitments. Authenticity through practice requires several elements as seen in Figure 8.

Figure 8



*The four elements of authenticity through practice.*

Potter's (2010) cautionary work on "the authenticity hoax" adds a critical dimension, arguing that authenticity has become commercialised and instrumentalist. This paradox underscores a fundamental challenge: transformative brands must pursue authenticity not as a market positioning strategy but as a genuine commitment, even while recognising that authenticity itself is contested and socially constructed. This means embracing what can be termed "reflexive humility": acknowledging imperfections, communicating trade-offs honestly, and positioning transformation as an ongoing journey rather than a completed destination.

The final and most important pillar grounds Transformative Branding in dynamic capabilities theory, particularly Teece's framework (1997; 2007; 2017). Dynamic capabilities are higher-order organisational processes that enable firms to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences in response to rapidly changing environments. This pillar will be fully elaborated in Chapter 1.5 on the next page.

## 1.5 Dynamic capability framework for brands

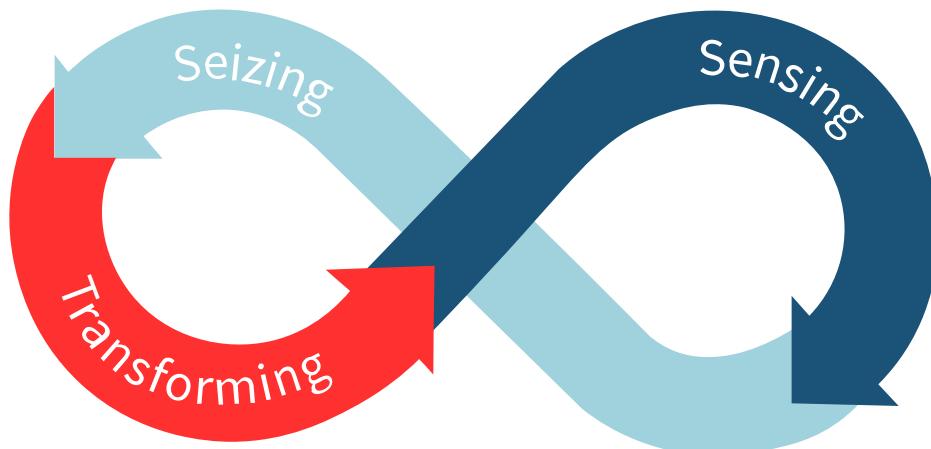
This section operationalises Transformative Branding through Teece's (1997) dynamic capabilities framework, specifying the microfoundations that enable brands to function as agents of transformation. By grounding Transformative Branding in established organisational theory, this framework provides both theoretical rigor and practical guidance for implementation.

### Dynamic capabilities: theoretical foundation

Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) defined dynamic capabilities as "the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments." This conceptualisation positioned organisational adaptability not as reactive scrambling but as a systematic, higher-order capability that could be deliberately cultivated. Teece's later work (2007; 2017) refined this framework by identifying three clusters of activities (Figure 9): sensing (identification and assessment of opportunities and threats), seizing (mobilisation of resources to capture value from opportunities), and transforming (continuous renewal through reconfiguration of assets and structures). Each cluster comprises specific microfoundations, the distinct skills, processes, procedures, organisational structures, and decision rules, that enable dynamic capabilities to function.

Transformative Branding adapts this framework by positioning the brand itself as the centre of dynamic capability. Rather than treating brands as static assets to be managed, Transformative Branding conceptualises them as dynamic systems capable of sensing societal shifts, seizing transformation opportunities, and continuously reconfiguring in response to stakeholder feedback and changing contexts.

Figure 9



*The dynamic capability building process visualised.*

## Sensing: cultural intelligence and worldview sensitivity

The first dimension of the dynamic capability framework is sensing: the ability to detect shifts in societal values, emerging social movements, and evolving stakeholder expectations. For transformative brands, this requires what Golob et al. (2022) term consumer worldview sensitivity, a sophisticated understanding of the beliefs, anxieties, and aspirations that shape stakeholder identities.

Unlike traditional market research focused on functional preferences and purchase intentions, worldview sensitivity involves ethnographic adaption to cultural currents and subcultural dynamics. This aligns with Holt's (2016) emphasis on cultural intelligence as a core branding capability. Brands must cultivate "cultural observatories," systematic processes for monitoring and interpreting cultural signals beyond conventional market metrics. Microfoundations for brand sensing can be seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10



*The elements of the sensing phase.*

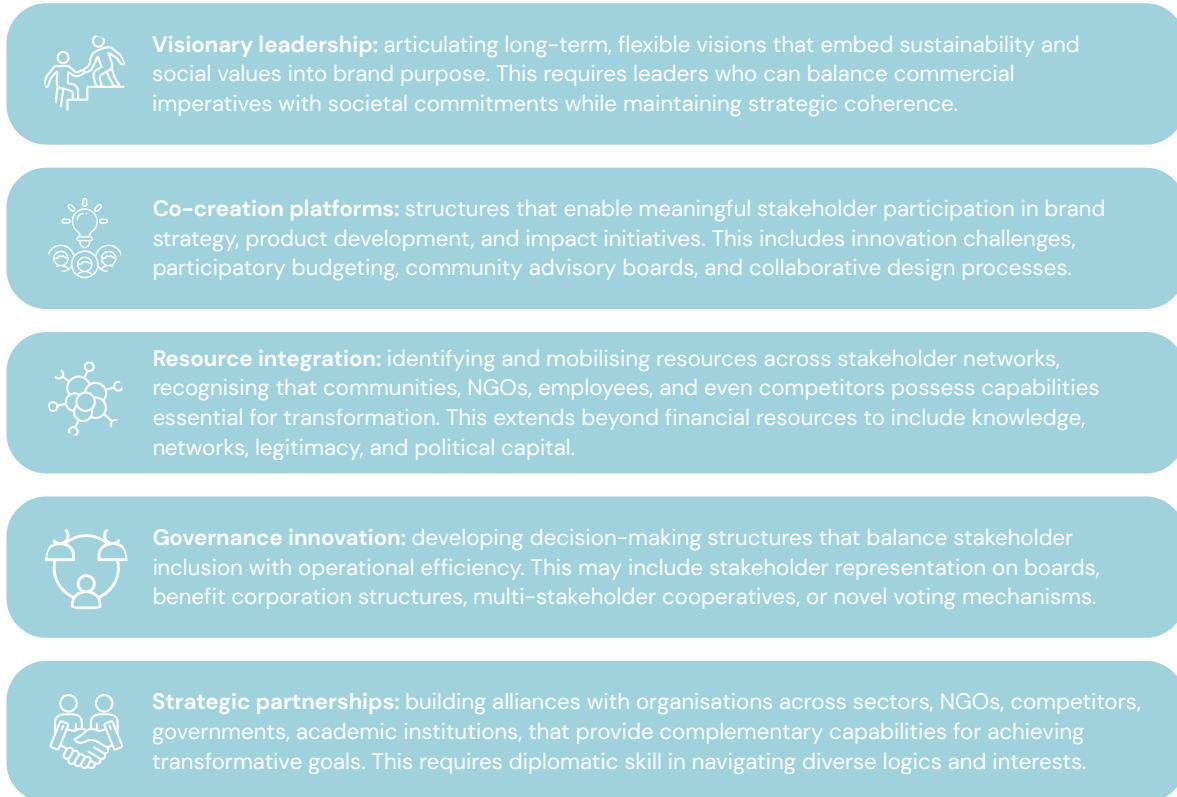
The sensing capability proves particularly critical given the accelerating pace of cultural change documented in Chapter 2. Generational transitions, regulatory shifts, platform evolution, and sustainability urgency create volatile contexts where yesterday's authentic positioning may become tomorrow's liability. Brands lacking robust sensing capabilities risk being blindsided by expectation shifts or cultural movements that render their practices obsolete.

## Seizing: Collaborative Coupling and stakeholder alignment

Once opportunities for transformative intervention are sensed, brands must seize them through strategic action. For transformative brands, this seizing process is fundamentally collaborative rather than unilateral. Spry et al.'s (2021) concept of collaborative coupling captures this: brands must connect leadership vision and organisational resources with the capabilities and aspirations of stakeholders.

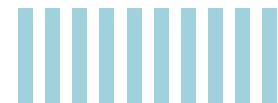
This requires developing what Golob et al. (2022) identify as stakeholder alignment capability, the ability to build shared purpose and coordinated action across diverse actors. Unlike traditional stakeholder management, which treats stakeholders as targets to be influenced, collaborative coupling treats stakeholders as co-creators with legitimate agency whose participation is essential for both legitimacy and effectiveness. Microfoundations for brand seizing can be seen in Figure 11.

Figure 11



*The elements of the seizing phase.*

Barney's (1991) resource-based view provides theoretical grounding here. Stakeholder relationships can be understood as valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources that generate sustained competitive advantage. Deep stakeholder alignment, particularly with employees and communities, proves difficult for competitors to replicate and thus constitutes a source of durable differentiation. The seizing capability determines whether sensed opportunities translate into meaningful action. Many organisations successfully sense shifts in stakeholder expectations but fail to seize transformation opportunities due to organisational inertia, conflicting priorities, or inadequate stakeholder alignment capabilities. Collaborative coupling addresses this by building coalitions with the commitment and capabilities to implement change.



## Transforming: dynamic learning and reconfiguration

The final dimension is transforming, the capacity to reconfigure organisational assets, practices, and identities in response to new insights and changing contexts. Golob et al.'s (2022) emphasis on dynamic learning captures this ongoing adaptation: transformative brands must treat sustainability and social impact not as fixed endpoints but as evolving targets requiring continuous experimentation and adjustment.

This learning capability closely relates to Argyris and Schön's (1997) distinction between single-loop learning (improving efficiency within existing frameworks) and double-loop learning (questioning and revising underlying assumptions). Transformative brands must excel at double-loop learning, regularly revisiting core assumptions about value creation, stakeholder relationships, and societal impact. Microfoundations for brand transforming can be seen in Figure 12.

Figure 12



*The elements of the transforming phase.*

The transforming capability ensures that Transformative Branding remains dynamic rather than becoming another static framework. As societal expectations evolve, regulatory contexts shift, technologies emerge, and new generations mature, brands must continuously reconfigure. Transforming capabilities prevent ossification, enabling brands to maintain relevance across changing contexts while preserving core commitments.

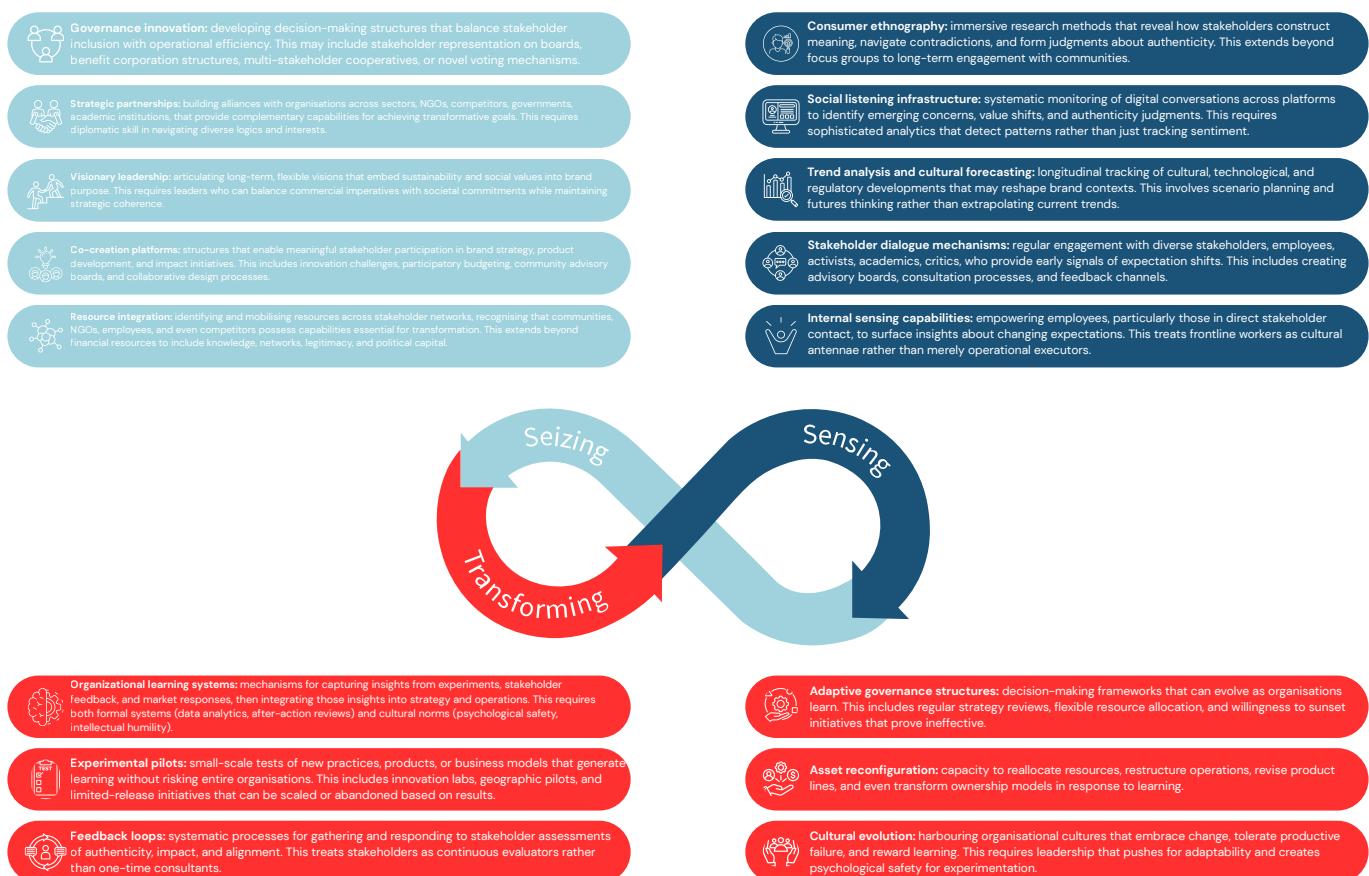
## Concluding: brands as agents of systemic change

Synthesising these three dimensions, sensing, seizing, transforming, reveals Transformative Branding as a continuous learn–adapt–reconfigure cycle that enables brands to function not merely as market actors but as agents of systemic societal change (Figure 13). This positions brands at the intersection of economic, cultural, and political systems, where they can influence consumption norms, shape cultural discourse, and catalyse collective action. As said before, Spry et al. (2021) emphasise that transformative brands do not simply respond to social change but actively shape new standards and this requires "paradigm-challenging leadership".

However, this paradigm-challenging function entails risks. Brands that overreach or misread cultural dynamics risk backlash, as evidenced by cases examined in chapter 2. The dynamic capability framework thus includes not only the capacity to execute a transformation but also the reflexivity to recognize when restraint or recalibration is necessary. Sensing capabilities should detect when activist positioning alienates core stakeholders, seizing capabilities should assess whether sufficient coalition support exists for transformation initiatives, and transforming capabilities should enable course corrections when experiments fail.

The dynamic capability framework also clarifies why traditional brand management approaches prove inadequate. Traditional approaches emphasise consistency and control, treating adaptation as threat rather than necessity. By contrast, Transformative Branding builds adaptability into brand DNA, treating evolution as inherent rather than exceptional. This shift from static to dynamic conceptualisation represents one of Transformative Branding's most fundamental departures from established practice.

Figure 13



The complete dynamic capability building process with elements per phase.

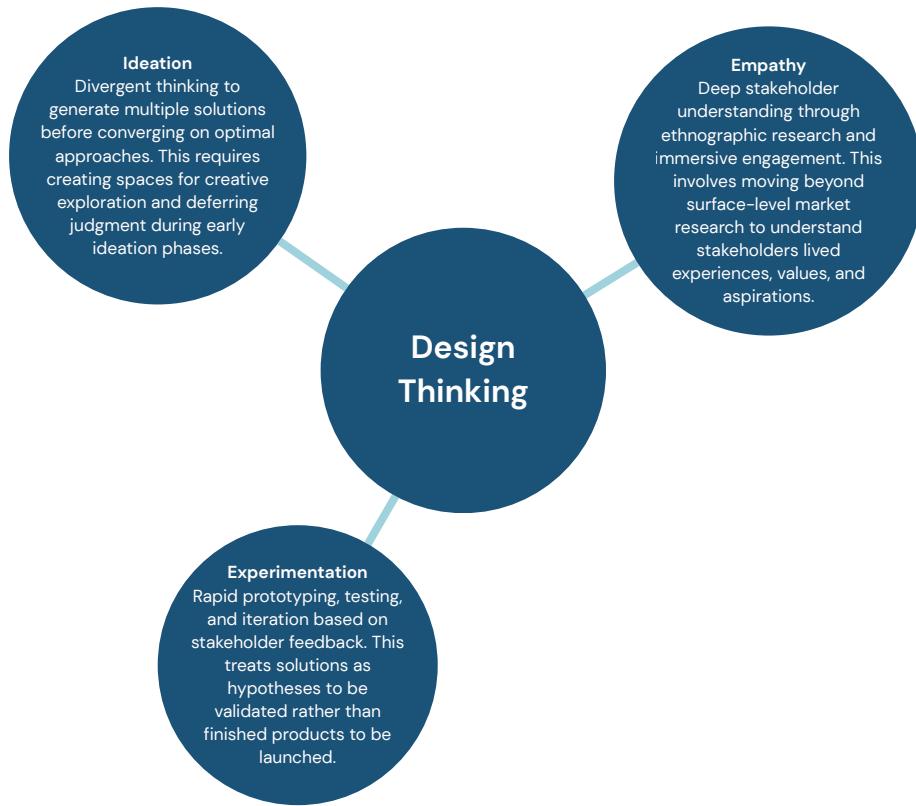
## 1.6 Design and innovation foundations

Transformative Branding represents an evolution of, rather than replacement for, established creative and innovation methodologies. This section explores how design thinking, co-creation theories, social innovation frameworks, and service-dominant logic inform the mechanisms Transformative Branding employs. Understanding these foundations clarifies how organisations can leverage existing capabilities while developing new ones.

### Relation to Design Thinking

Transformative Branding builds on elements of design thinking in its concept, the human-centred innovation approach popularised by IDEO and Stanford's school. Brown (2008) defines design thinking through three core principles seen in Figure 14.

Figure 14



*Design Thinking and its core principles (Brown, 2008).*

These principles map directly onto Transformative Branding capabilities. Empathy corresponds to consumer worldview sensitivity (Golob et al., 2022), the capacity to understand diverse stakeholder beliefs, anxieties, and aspirations. Ideation aligns with collaborative coupling (Spry et al., 2021), generating solutions through multi-stakeholder dialogue rather than unilateral design. Experimentation embodies dynamic learning (Golob et al., 2022), treating brand evolution as an ongoing process of sensing, testing, and reconfiguring.

Design thinking's emphasis on "showing not telling" through prototypes and tangible demonstrations aligns with Transformative Branding's emphasis on operational authenticity over rhetorical claims. Both approaches prioritise demonstrated commitment over projected messages, recognising that stakeholders judge brands through behavioural patterns rather than isolated statements.

However, Transformative Branding extends design thinking in three significant ways. First, while design thinking typically focuses on designing offerings (products, services, experiences), Transformative Branding applies similar principles to organisational identity itself. The brand becomes the object of design, continuously iterated in dialogue with stakeholders. Second, design thinking centres on "users" or "customers" as primary stakeholders, while Transformative Branding recognises diverse stakeholder constituencies, employees, communities, activists, regulators, competitors, with potentially conflicting interests requiring negotiation rather than optimisation around a single user group. Third, design thinking emphasises problem-solving within existing systems, while Transformative Branding challenges dominant paradigms and envisions alternative futures. This shifts from user-centricity to stakeholder plurality, from problem-solving to paradigm-challenging, and from products to organisational identity.

## Relation to Co-Creation

Transformative Branding builds extensively on co-creation tradition in marketing and innovation. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) pioneered value co-creation, arguing that customers are active collaborators rather than passive recipients in their DART framework (Figure 15).

Figure 15



*The DART framework.*

This framework anticipates Transformative Branding's emphasis on collaborative coupling and stakeholder involvement. However, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) focus primarily on customer co-creation within commercial contexts. Transformative Branding extends this to multi-stakeholder co-creation engaging employees, communities, activists, and NGOs alongside customers; value co-creation beyond products, applying participatory principles to sustainability strategy, social impact initiatives, and organisational governance; and co-creation of brand meaning and identity itself rather than just product or service attributes. Sanders and Stappers (2008) further develop participatory design methods through their "convivial toolbox," providing tools that enable non-designers to participate meaningfully in design processes. Their emphasis on scaffolding participation, creating structures that enable contribution without requiring specialised expertise, resonates with Transformative Branding's need to facilitate stakeholder engagement across diverse capabilities and backgrounds.

## Relation to social innovation and systemic change

Transformative Branding also draws from social innovation literature, particularly frameworks for systemic change. Westley et al. (2014) identify key principles for catalysing social innovation:

- Interconnectedness awareness: recognising that social challenges are embedded in complex systems with feedback loops and emergent properties. This requires systems thinking rather than linear cause-effect models.
- Leverage point identification: finding strategic intervention points where modest efforts generate disproportionate systemic effects. This involves understanding system dynamics to identify high-impact opportunities.
- Coalition building: assembling diverse actors with complementary capabilities and motivations. This recognises that systemic change requires coordinated action across multiple stakeholders.
- Adaptive experimentation: Testing interventions, learning from failures, and iteratively refining approaches. This treats social innovation as an ongoing learning process rather than implementing predetermined solutions.

These principles align closely with Transformative Branding's systemic orientation, and the leverage point concept proves particularly relevant. Transformative brands identify strategic interventions where brand actions can catalyse broader change. Social innovation frameworks also emphasise the importance of "intermediary organisations" that connect diverse actors and translate between different logics (market, civic, governmental). Transformative brands increasingly function as such intermediaries, bridging commercial needs with social purposes and facilitating coordination among stakeholders who might not otherwise collaborate.

## Summarizing

These design and innovation foundations provide Transformative Branding with operational methodologies and legitimating precedents. Organisations familiar with design thinking can recognise familiar principles while extending them to brand transformation. Those practicing co-creation can build on existing capabilities while broadening stakeholder scope. Those engaged in social innovation can leverage brands as vehicles for systemic change. This evolutionary positioning offers strategic advantages. It reduces implementation barriers by framing Transformative Branding as extension rather than replacement. It respects institutional knowledge and existing capabilities while pushing organisations to develop new ones. It creates accessible entry points, allowing organisations to begin through familiar methods before progressing to more ambitious interventions. And it demonstrates pragmatic feasibility, showing how Transformative Branding synthesises proven methodologies rather than proposing utopian ideals disconnected from organisational realities.

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## Conclusion

Chapter 1 established the theoretical foundations of Transformative Branding, positioning it as a conceptual evolution from image management toward dynamic capability. Drawing on branding, sustainability, design, and organisational theory, the chapter demonstrated that brands are no longer static identity markers but adaptive systems able to sense societal change, seize opportunities for purposeful intervention, and transform their operations in dialogue with stakeholders.

By synthesising service-dominant logic, stakeholder theory, cultural strategy, and dynamic-capabilities thinking, the chapter defined four interconnected pillars, agency and intentionality, dynamic capabilities logic, collaborative coupling, and authenticity through practice, that together articulate how brands can function as agents of systemic change. The integration of design thinking, co-creation, and social-innovation principles translated these abstract ideas into practical mechanisms for sensing, seizing, and transforming.

The resulting conceptual model framed Transformative Branding as both a theoretical construct and a managerial roadmap: external drivers create pressures; the brand's dynamic capabilities provide mechanisms; and these mechanisms generate outcomes such as stakeholder trust, cultural relevance, resilience, and long-term advantage. Importantly, this model redefines brand management as a strategic, organisation-wide capability embedded in governance and learning, not a communications function.

With this foundation in place, the thesis now turns outward. Chapter 2 examines the contextual drivers, generational shifts, regulatory and ESG pressures, digital-platform evolution, and sustainability imperatives, that make the development of these transformative capabilities an operational necessity rather than an aspirational ideal.

# Chapter 2: drivers of change

While Chapter 1 established the theoretical foundations of Transformative Branding, this chapter examines the forces that make this approach not only conceptually appealing but operationally needed. Four interconnected drivers are reshaping the brand landscape: generational transitions that redefine authenticity and value expectations, regulatory and ESG pressures that embed sustainability into corporate accountability, digital platform evolution that redistributes cultural authority, and sustainability needs that transform innovation processes. Together, these drivers create a context in which brands must evolve from static identity markers to dynamic capabilities for societal engagement, a collection of case studies is presented that demonstrate both the promise and downfall of transformation.

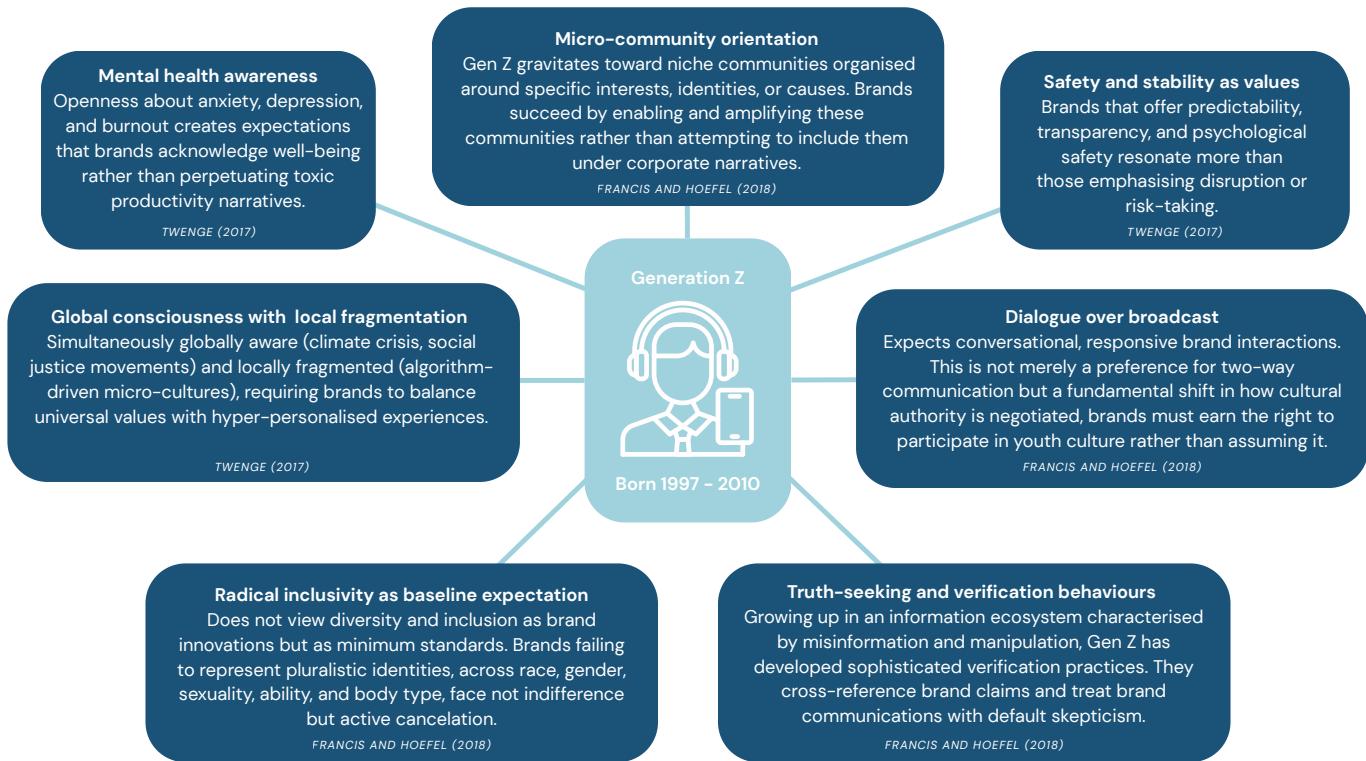
## 2.1 Generational transition

The emergence of Generation Z and Generation Alpha as dominant consumer and workforce cohorts represent a fundamental recalibration of brand expectations. Unlike previous generations whose brand relationships were mediated primarily through product functionality and aspirational lifestyle associations, these younger cohorts evaluate brands through the lens of values alignment, cultural authenticity, and systemic impact. While consultancy research synthesises these trends at scale, longitudinal academic studies (e.g. Twenge, 2017) provide empirical grounding for the behavioural shifts described.

## Generation Z: the "True Gen" and the demand for authenticity

Francis and Hoefel's (2018) McKinsey research positioned Gen Z as the "True Gen", a generation defined by its search for truth, authenticity, and individual self-expression within collective contexts. Unlike the identity-driven consumption of Millennials, Gen Z's brand relationships are instrumental and no-nonsense: brands are evaluated based on whether they enable identity expression, facilitate community belonging, and demonstrate genuine commitment to societal issues. Twenge's (2017) longitudinal research in iGen deepens this portrait by documenting how constant digital connectivity has reshaped identity formation, social relationships, and psychological well-being. Twenge (2017) demonstrates that iGen (her term for Gen Z) exhibits distinct behavioural patterns: delayed adolescence, risk-averse but emotionally fragile, hyper-aware of global crises, and sceptical of institutions. Both of the researches give direct implications to brand strategy and engagement (Figure 16).

Figure 16



Characteristics of Gen Z, creating implications for brand management.

The most current data comes from Deloitte's (2025) Gen Z and Millennial Survey (N=23482), which confirms ongoing evolution in how younger generations balance financial growth with meaning, mental health, and sustainability. The most important facts can be summarised in:

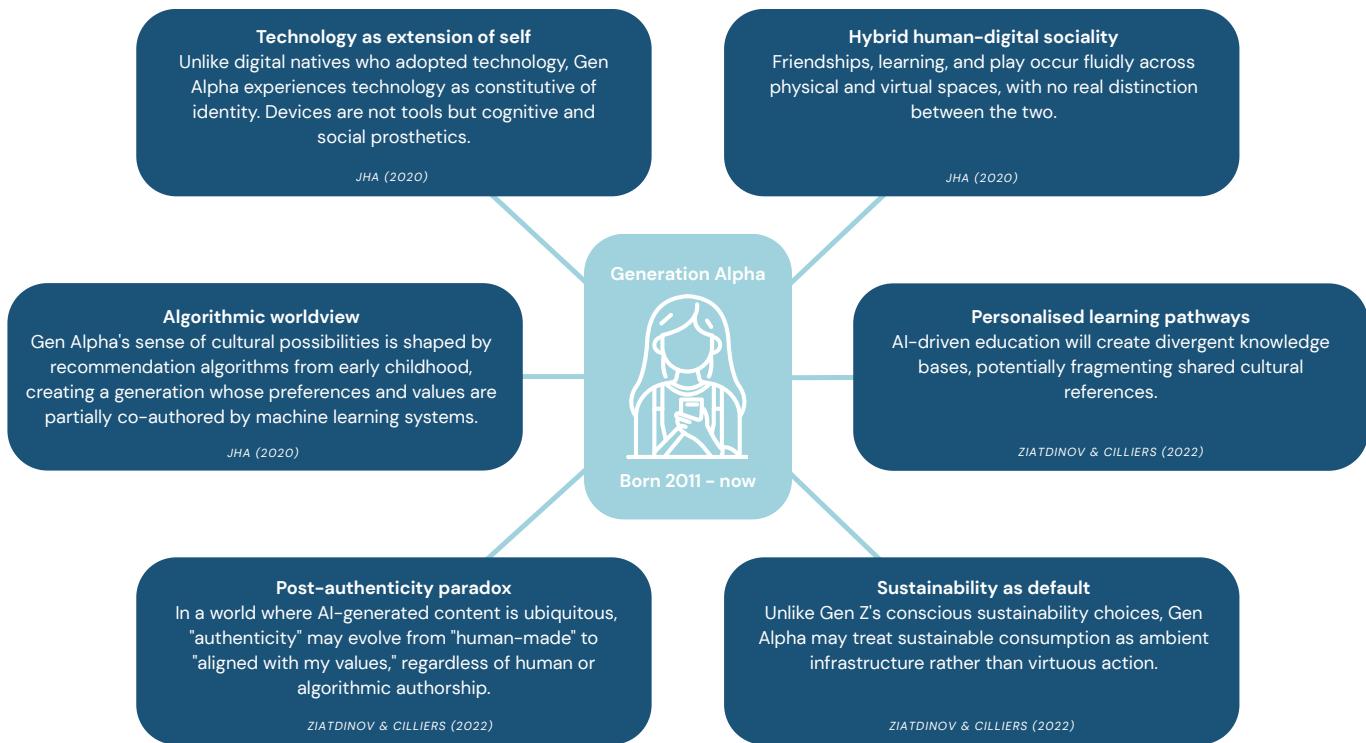
- Purpose beyond profit: 44% of Gen Z would turn down a job or assignment that conflicts with their values, even if it meant financial sacrifice.
- Employer accountability: 52% of Gen Z have asked employers to act on climate change, and 49% have pressed them on diversity and inclusion.
- Work-life integration challenges: despite valuing work-life balance theoretically, 46% of Gen Z feel overwhelmed or stressed all or most of the time, indicating a gap between values and lived experience.
- Sustainability commitment despite cost-of-living pressure: even amid economic uncertainty, 45% of Gen Z say they have changed the types of products and services they buy to reduce their environmental impact.

These findings emphasise that Gen Z's values are resilient under economic pressure rather than luxury preferences, making them durable strategic considerations rather than passing trends.

## Generation Alpha: the AI-native cohort and post-human authenticity

Given Gen Alpha's young age (maximum 15 years), research remains emergent and should be interpreted as preliminary projections rather than established findings. Looking ahead, Jha (2020) and Ziatdinov & Cilliers's (2022) research on Generation Alpha (born 2010-present) suggests an even more profound shift. Gen Alpha is the first generation whose identity formation is co-constructed with artificial intelligence, from AI tutors and voice assistants in childhood to algorithmic curation of cultural exposure. Jha's (2020) work identifies several defining characteristics, Ziatdinov & Cilliers (2022) add that Gen Alpha's educational and consumption patterns will be fundamentally different. All these characteristics can be found in Figure 17.

Figure 17



Characteristics of Gen Alpha, creating implications for brand management.

For Transformative Branding, Gen Alpha represents a fundamental challenge to inherited assumptions about authenticity and meaning-making. Brands must prepare for a cohort that does not distinguish between "real" and "artificial" but evaluates everything, human, brand, or AI, through the lens of value alignment and experiential resonance.

## Theoretical grounding: generational cohort theory

While generational analysis risks overgeneralisation, Strauss and Howe's (1991) generational theory provides useful conceptual scaffolding. They argue that generations develop distinct personalities shaped by shared historical events during formative years, creating predictable cycles of social mood and institutional attitudes.

More recently, Parry and Urwin (2011) have critiqued simplistic generational typologies, emphasising the need to distinguish between age effects, period effects, and cohort effects. Their work reminds us that generational differences must be contextualised within broader socio-economic and technological changes rather than treated as inherent characteristics.

Despite these methodological cautions, the evidence strongly suggests that cohorts coming of age in the 2010s and 2020s exhibit distinctive values and behaviours that require brands to fundamentally rethink engagement strategies, moving from lifestyle alignment toward value-centred engagement.

## 2.2 Regulatory & ESG pressures

Alongside generational shifts, regulatory frameworks and investor expectations have transformed ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) from voluntary reputation management to business-critical infrastructure. This transition makes Transformative Branding not just culturally resonant but legally and financially necessary.

### The financial business case for ESG integration

Aydoğmuş et al.'s (2022) comprehensive meta-analysis demonstrates that strong ESG performance is positively correlated with firm value and profitability. Critically, Aydoğmuş (2022) finds that the ESG-performance relationship is strengthening over time rather than weakening, suggesting that ESG integration is becoming embedded in market valuation mechanisms rather than remaining a niche preference. Clark et al.'s (2015) earlier work for Harvard Business School reinforces this business case, demonstrating that companies integrating sustainability into core strategy benefit. All findings are summarised in Figure 18.

Figure 18



Overview of effects by a positive ESG performance.

These findings position ESG not as a cost or constraint but as a strategic capability that generates durable competitive advantage. For Transformative Branding, this means sustainability commitments must be authentic and operational, superficial "green marketing" is not only culturally ineffective but financially suboptimal.

## Regulatory intensification: from disclosure to accountability

The regulatory environment has shifted from voluntary disclosure frameworks (like GRI and CDP) to mandatory reporting requirements with legal enforcement. Several developments illustrate this transition:

- European Union Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (EU CSRD): effective from 2024, the CSRD requires approximately 50,000 companies operating in the EU to report on sustainability impacts using standardised metrics. Unlike previous voluntary frameworks, CSRD mandates third-party assurance and includes legal liability for misreporting, making greenwashing a legal risk rather than merely a reputational one.
- SEC Climate Disclosure Rules (U.S.): the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission has proposed rules requiring public companies to disclose Scope 1, 2, and (in some cases) Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions, as well as climate-related financial risks. While facing legal challenges, the direction is clear: climate impact will be treated as material financial information.

International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB): The IFRS Foundation established the ISSB in 2021 to develop global baseline sustainability disclosure standards. Over 30 jurisdictions have committed to adopting or aligning with ISSB standards, creating convergence toward mandatory, standardised ESG reporting.

This regulatory intensification has several implications for brands:

- Transparency is non-negotiable: brands can no longer selectively disclose favourable data while obscuring problems. Comprehensive, audited sustainability reporting becomes mandatory.
- Greenwashing carries legal risk: vague sustainability claims without substantiation can now trigger regulatory enforcement, class-action lawsuits, and shareholder litigation.
- Supply chain accountability: scope 3 emissions requirements and human rights due diligence laws (like Germany's Supply Chain Act) make brands legally responsible for supplier conduct, requiring deep supply chain transformation.
- ESG becomes governance-level priority: with board liability for ESG misreporting, sustainability shifts from marketing/CSR departments to core governance functions.

For Transformative Branding, this regulatory context reinforces the need for authentic, operationalised sustainability embedded in business models rather than communicated through marketing. Brands must develop the dynamic learning and stakeholder alignment capabilities outlined in Chapter 1 not as ideals but as requirements.

## 2.3 Digital platform evolution & creator economy

The rapid evolution of digital platforms has fundamentally redistributed cultural authority, transforming how brands achieve credibility and influence. This shift represents a move from broadcast control (brands as primary message authors) to participatory credibility (brands as contributors within networked cultural production).

### Gen Z's digital-first consumption

Witt and Baird's (2018) 'The Gen Z Frequency' provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how Gen Z's digital fluency creates new expectations for brand engagement. Their research identifies several important factors:

- Cultural fluency over cultural engineering: gen Z detects and rejects brands that attempt to manufacture youth culture trends. Instead, brands must demonstrate authentic participation in existing cultural conversations, contributing value rather than attempting to control narratives.
- Dialogue-based engagement: traditional broadcast advertising is not merely ineffective but actively counterproductive. Gen Z expects brands to engage in ongoing conversations across platforms, responding to feedback, acknowledging mistakes, and co-creating meaning.
- Platform-specific jargon: each platform (TikTok, Instagram, Discord, Reddit) has distinct cultural norms, communication styles, and content expectations. Brands cannot simply repurpose content but must develop platform-native fluency.
- Speed and responsiveness: Gen Z's expectation for real-time interaction means brands must develop agile content production and community management capabilities. Delayed responses or stiff corporate communications signal inauthenticity.

Witt and Baird's framework emphasises that Gen Z engagement is not about "marketing to youth" but about earning cultural citizenship within youth communities. This requires humility, listening, experimentation, and willingness to be corrected, capabilities rarely associated with traditional brand management.

### Omnichannel expectations

While industry research should be interpreted with appropriate caution, NIQ's (2024) data on Gen Z retail patterns documents how digital-first expectations extend to commerce:

- Channel usage: Gen Z does not distinguish between "online" and "offline" shopping but expects seamless transitions between digital discovery, in-store experience, and cross-channel fulfilment.
- Research-intensive purchasing: Gen Z conducts extensive pre-purchase research across platforms (YouTube reviews, Reddit discussions, TikTok unboxings), expecting brands to provide comprehensive information without holding back information.
- Social commerce integration: 73% of Gen Z shoppers have discovered products through social media, and 55% have purchased directly through social platforms, making social commerce infrastructure essential.
- Personalisation with privacy: Gen Z expects personalised experiences but is highly skeptical of data extraction. Brands must balance customisation with transparent data governance.

These patterns illustrate that digital transformation is not merely about adding e-commerce functionality but requires fundamental rethinking of how brands create value across integrated physical-digital ecosystems.

## The creator economy

The rise of the creator economy has redistributed cultural influence from institutions (brands, media companies, celebrities) to individuals with authentic audience relationships. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Twitch, and Patreon enable creators to function as micro-brands with direct audience access, creating new power dynamics:

- Influencer partnerships replace advertising: traditional celebrity endorsements are less effective than partnerships with micro-influencers whose audiences trust their recommendations. Brands become enablers of creator content rather than primary message authors.
- Co-creation and brand ambassador models: successful brands invite creators into product development, allowing them to shape offerings for their communities. This distributed authorship builds credibility and cultural relevance.
- Platform algorithm governance: brand visibility is increasingly governed by platform algorithms rather than paid media. Success requires understanding algorithmic logics and creating content that platforms boost organically.
- Authenticity policing by communities: creator communities actively police inauthenticity, calling out "sellout" behaviour or brand partnerships that seem inauthentic. Brands must navigate these community norms carefully.

Abidin's (2016) research on "calibrated amateurism" in influencer culture illuminates this dynamic. She argues that successful influencers cultivate an appearance of authenticity through strategic self-disclosure, blending professional content creation with intimate personal sharing. Brands partnering with influencers must respect this calculated authenticity rather than imposing corporate messaging frameworks. The earlier work on participatory culture from Green & Jenkins (2011) provides theoretical grounding for these shifts. Green & Jenkins (2011) argued that digital media enable "convergence culture" where audiences are not passive consumers but active participants who appropriate, remix, and redistribute cultural content. For brands, this means releasing control over meaning-making and instead providing "cultural resources" that communities can activate.

## 2.4 Sustainability as a core capability

Sustainability has evolved from a peripheral CSR concern to a core driver of innovation and competitive differentiation. This section examines how sustainability pressures, from both consumer expectations and structural incentives, make Transformative Branding operationally necessary.

### Consumer expectations

First Insight's (2020) research on Gen Z consumer spending reveals a dual dynamic:

1. Willingness to pay premium for sustainability: 73% of Gen Z consumers surveyed are willing to pay more for sustainable products, and 54% would pay a 10%+ premium. This contradicts the assumption that sustainability is a luxury preference abandoned during economic hardship.
2. Intense skepticism toward greenwashing: 76% of Gen Z shoppers research a company's sustainability claims before purchasing. They cross-reference marketing claims with third-party certifications, supply chain investigations, and community reports.

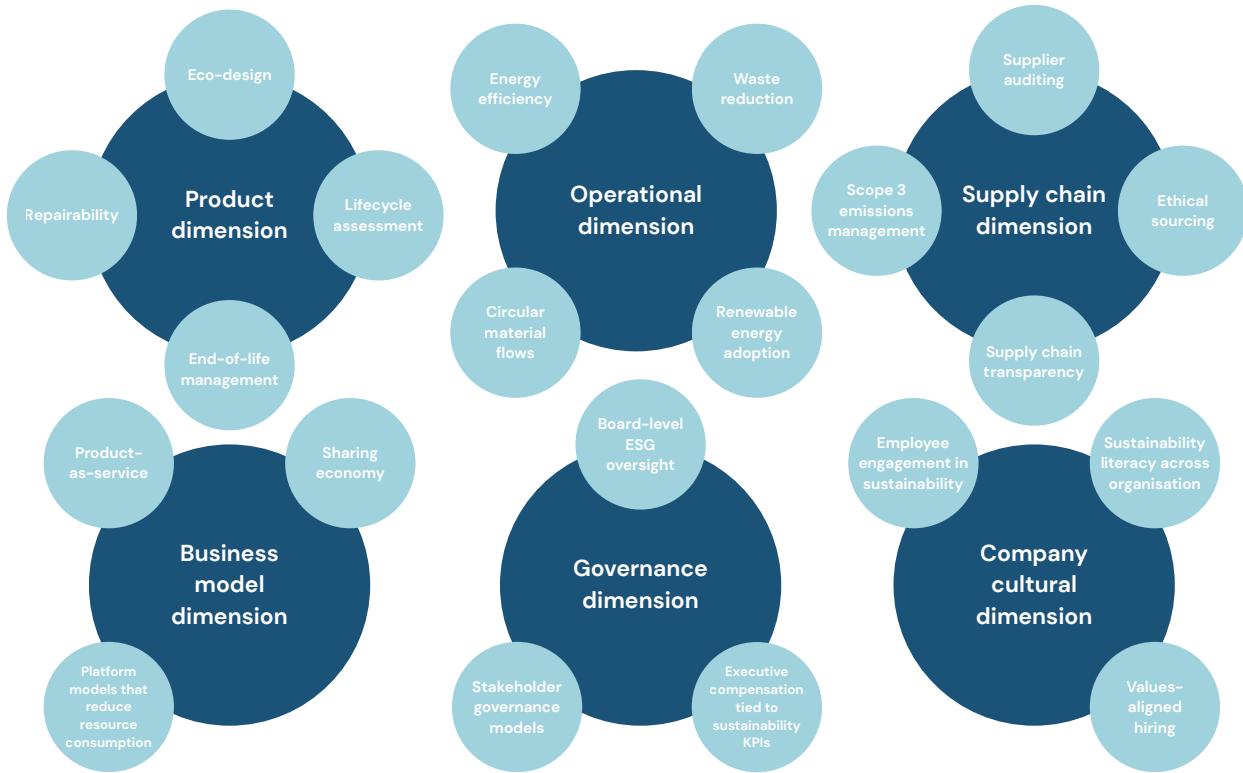
This creates a high-stakes environment where authentic sustainability generates loyalty and premium willingness, but inauthentic claims trigger boycotts and reputational damage. Brands cannot simply communicate sustainability; they must operationalise and verify it through transparent practices.

Additional data from Deloitte (2025) reinforces this pattern: despite cost-of-living pressures, 45% of Gen Z have changed purchasing behaviours to reduce environmental impact, and 37% have stopped buying from brands that don't align with their values. This behavioural consistency suggests that sustainability is not just a preference but a durable value commitment.

## Sustainability as systemic capability

Integrating the regulatory pressures (section 2.2), consumer expectations, and innovation opportunities, sustainability emerges as a multi-dimensional capability that transformative brands must cultivate (Figure 19).

Figure 19



This multi-dimensional nature means sustainability cannot be relegated to a single department but must be embedded across organisational functions, precisely what Transformative Branding requires. The brand becomes the organising principle that aligns these diverse sustainability initiatives into a coherent, externally legible identity.

## The five-stage sustainability integration framework

Nidumolu, Prahalad, and Rangaswami's (2009) influential Harvard Business Review article argues that sustainability is the key driver of innovation in the 21st century. They propose a five-stage framework for sustainability integration (Figure 20).

Figure 20



Figure 20: the five -stage framework by Prahalad and Rangaswami (2009)

This framework illustrates that sustainability is not a static target but an evolutionary process that progressively transforms every dimension of business. Critically, each stage requires different capabilities: early stages demand operational efficiency and supply chain management, while later stages require visionary leadership, ecosystem orchestration, and cultural transformation.



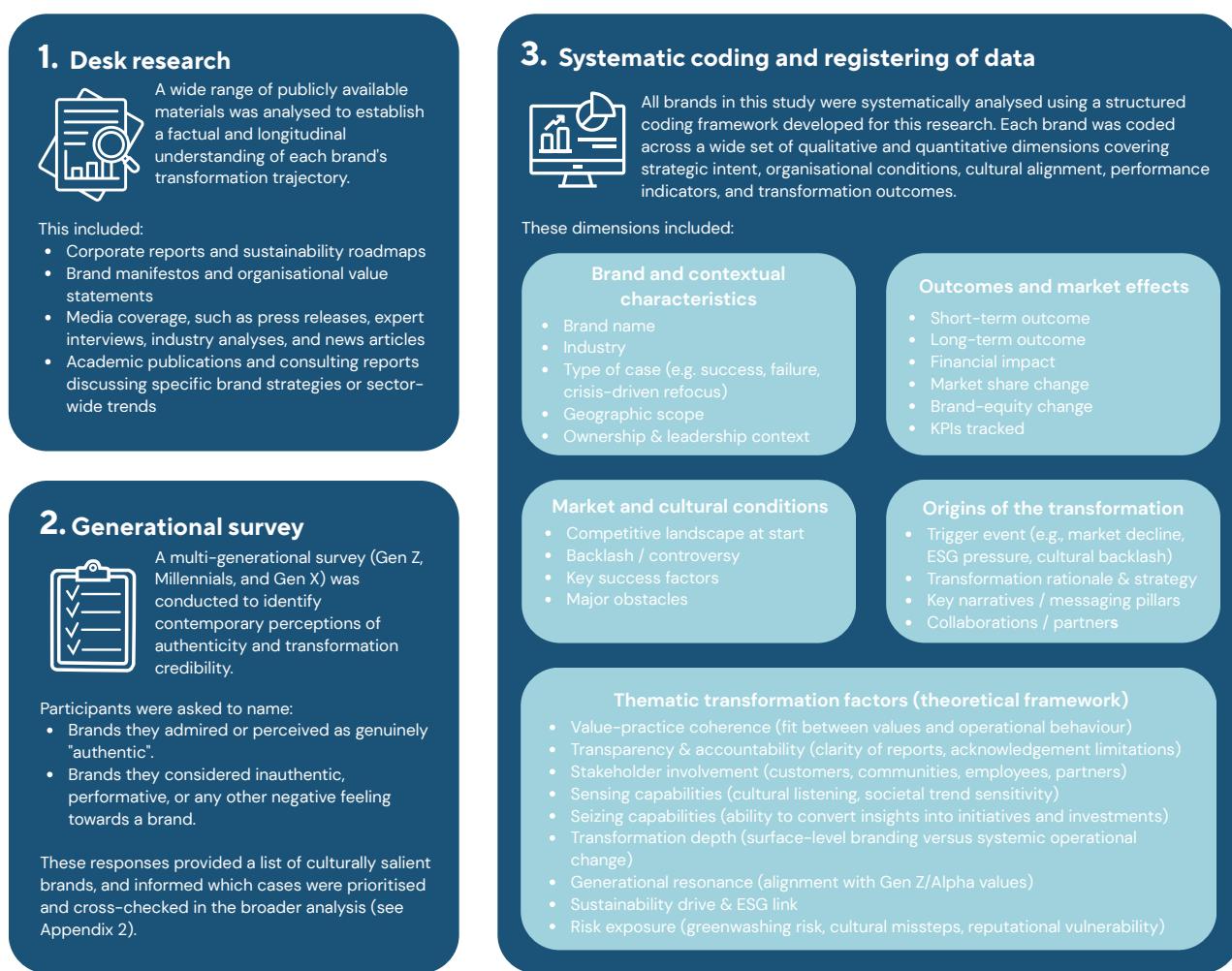
## 2.5 Case study analysis

The theoretical drivers outlined above converge in real-world brand transformations with varying degrees of success. To understand how Transformative Branding manifests in practice, and where it breaks down, this section examines 59 brand cases analysed as part of this research project (see Appendix 2). The analysis combines two in-depth contrasting cases (Patagonia and Jaguar) with broader cross-case pattern analysis across the 59 brands coded along transformation drivers, authenticity mechanisms, generational resonance, value chain alignment, and organisational enablers/barriers. These cases are used to demonstrate how the identified drivers manifest in practice, rather than as statistically generalisable evidence.

### Case exploration

The case study research followed a multi-stage qualitative comparative analysis approach (Figure 21)

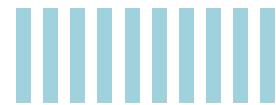
Figure 21



*The steps and elements of the analysis.*

This comprehensive coding approach resulted in a structured and comparable dataset, enabling cross-case comparison and identification of recurring patterns, contradictions, and transformation archetypes.

It is important to note that not all categories could be filled for every brand, as many organisations do not publicly disclose details such as budget ranges, internal KPIs, backstage implementation structures, or leadership-level decision-making processes. However, across cases enough data was consistently available to form an accurate and multi-dimensional understanding of each transformation. Missing fields therefore did not compromise the analytical validity of the dataset; instead, they highlighted where brands lack transparency, an insight that aligns with the authenticity criteria examined in this thesis.



## Case selection

To ensure breadth and reduce selection bias, brand cases were chosen through four complementary pathways (Figure 22), not putting requirements on company size, age or other limiting factors. This allowed for both depth and breadth in understanding Transformative Branding dynamics.

Figure 22

### 1. Generational survey results

Respondents indicated brands they trusted, admired, or actively avoided. This method surfaced cases such as Tony's Chocolonely, Tesla, BrewDog, H&M, Adidas, and SHEIN, many of which were not originally included in academic literature but hold strong cultural meaning for younger generations.



### 2. Large public companies (S&P 500, AEX, FTSE100)

These brands were selected for their visibility, data availability, and strategic public commitments (e.g., Unilever, Nike, Shell). This allowed systematic comparison between high-resource companies undergoing long-term brand and sustainability transformations.



### 3. Recent high-impact brand transformations

Cases were selected based on notable successes or failures:

- Successes: Patagonia (systemic alignment), Microsoft (cultural renewal), IKEA (circularity commitments).
- Failures: Jaguar (misaligned repositioning), BrewDog (culture versus communication gap), BP (Beyond Petroleum backlash).



### 4. Thematically relevant brands

Additional cases were chosen based on relevance to key drivers in this thesis, such as:

- Sustainability transformations
- Cultural repositioning
- Authenticity crises



Selection criteria and examples of selected cases.



## Synthesis: highlighted cases

These two cases are great examples of how Transformative Branding principles can manifest at opposite ends of the spectrum. Patagonia demonstrates how deeply embedded values, operational coherence, and long-term cultural sensing enable a brand to transform authentically and sustainably. Jaguar, by contrast, illustrates how misaligned positioning, weak sensing capabilities, and insufficient internal alignment can undermine even ambitious transformation strategies. Together, these cases show how the same external pressures and generational expectations can lead to fundamentally different outcomes depending on the organisation's underlying capabilities, governance structures, and cultural maturity.

### *Designer of outdoor clothing and gear for the silent sports; Patagonia*

Patagonia exemplifies Transformative Branding at its highest level, where brand purpose and business model are structurally integrated. Founded by climber Yvon Chouinard with a mission to "save our home planet" (Chouinard & Patagonia, 2021), Patagonia has consistently prioritised environmental activism over short-term profitability. A couple of factors highlight the transformation successes that they have booked and visual examples (Figure 23):

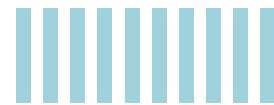
- Radical transparency: Patagonia publishes detailed supply chain information, acknowledges environmental impacts candidly, and invites scrutiny through initiatives like the Footprint Chronicles.
- Anti-consumption messaging: the famous "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign actively discouraged unnecessary consumption, prioritising brand integrity over sales maximisation. Produced the documentary 'Shitropocene' about over consumption in current times and their role in it.
- Operational alignment: Patagonia invests in organic cotton, recycled materials, repair programs (Worn Wear), and political activism (1% for the Planet, environmental lawsuit funding).
- Ownership transfer for purpose: in 2022, Chouinard transferred ownership to a trust and nonprofit structure ensuring profits fund environmental causes rather than enriching shareholders.

Patagonia's transformation is authentic because it is systemic. Environmental values are not communicated through marketing but embedded in governance, product development, supply chain, and capital structure. This creates credibility that withstands scrutiny, Gen Z consumers trust Patagonia precisely because its practices match its messaging. For Patagonia it is an easier case, as it was a born sustainable brand, but their constant adaptation to changes is an example to follow.

Figure 23



The logo (top left), advertisement (right) and content (bottom left) of Patagonia.



### **Dare to show, copy nothing; Jaguar**

Jaguar's 2024-2025 transformation toward electric luxury represents a high-risk attempt to reinvent a heritage brand for a sustainable future. The case illustrates the challenges of Transformative Branding when heritage and future orientation appear incompatible. The strategy used by Jaguar can be summarised in the following points (visual in Figure 24):

- Complete EV transition: Jaguar committed to becoming electric-only by 2025, discontinuing all combustion engines.
- Brand repositioning toward younger, tech-forward luxury, targeting Gen Z and younger Millennials rather than traditional luxury consumers.
- Design language disruption through a new visual identity emphasised minimalism and futurism, deliberately breaking from heritage aesthetics.
- Pricing strategy shift: Repositioning upmarket to compete with high-end EVs (Porsche Taycan, Mercedes EQS).

However Jaguar did not account for the results of their transformation being very negative, as even the new generations did not appreciate the change. Parts of this negative reaction consist of:

- Heritage enthusiast backlash: Long-time Jaguar owners perceived the transformation as brand abandonment, viewing the heritage rejection as inauthentic.
- Confused brand positioning: The aggressive repositioning created ambiguity about who Jaguar is for, neither heritage consumers nor EV-native luxury buyers found clear value propositions.
- Implementation gaps: Production delays and quality concerns undermined the futuristic brand narrative.

Jaguar's case demonstrates that transformation requires negotiation with brand heritage rather than wholesale rejection. Effective Transformative Branding finds continuity within change, honouring heritage while evolving purpose. Jaguar's approach felt more like brand replacement than transformation, alienating existing stakeholders without fully securing new ones.

Figure 24



The old Jaguar branding and design (left) versus the new branding and design (right).

### Synthesis: patterns of all case studies

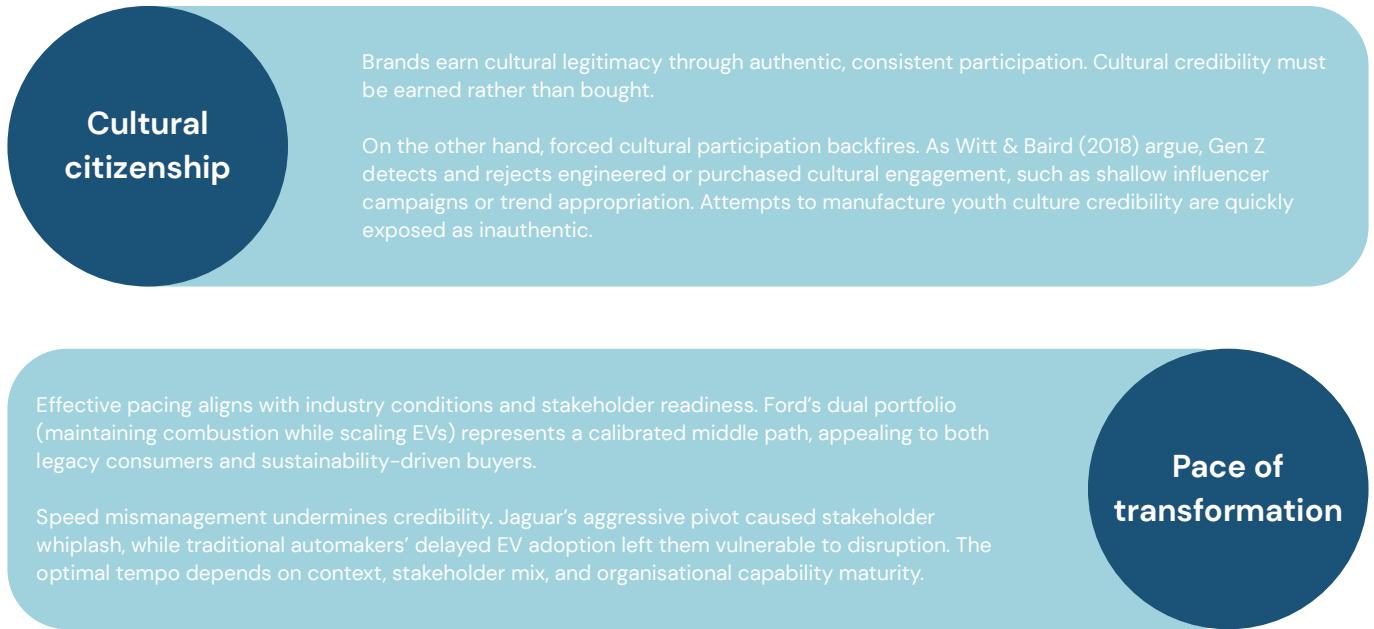
Next to the cases of Patagonia and Jaguar, as mentioned before I analysed 57 brands (full list in Appendix 2) in different industries on their transformation for this synthesis. Revealing systematic patterns that highlight the differences between successful and failed cases, seen in Figure 25.

Figure 25



All systematic patterns found in the case research.

Figure 25



*All systematic patterns found in the case research.*

Gathering all the patterns from the all the 59 brands, it is now important to link them to the theoretical sources that they validate:

- Dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 1997) are indeed central, brands must continuously sense cultural shifts (Tesla initially succeeded; Jaguar missed stakeholder signals), seize opportunities through collaboration (Patagonia's stakeholder engagement; Jaguar's unilateral imposition), and transform organisational assets (Patagonia's ownership restructuring; Ford's portfolio separation).
- Collaborative coupling (Spry et al., 2021) is not optional but essential for legitimacy. Brands that maintain hierarchical authorship (Jaguar, aspects of Tesla) face authenticity challenges, while those that distribute meaning-making (Patagonia, Ford's community engagement) build resilience.
- Authenticity through practice (Beverland & Farrelly, 2009) requires systemic alignment across dimensions. Partial implementations create vulnerability, marketing-led transformation without operational transformation, environmental commitments without governance transformation, or inclusivity messaging without compensation equity all generate credibility gaps.
- Sustainability as dynamic capability (Golob et al., 2022; Nidumolu et al., 2009) means continuous learning and adaptation rather than static achievement. Patagonia's ongoing acknowledgment of imperfections demonstrates this learning orientation, while brands claiming sustainability completion invite skepticism.

## Limitations

While the systematic coding framework enabled rigorous cross-case comparison, the analysis is limited by (1) reliance on publicly available information, which varies significantly by organisation, and (2) the absence of internal organisational data on decision-making processes, budget allocations, and implementation challenges. Future research employing participant observation or embedded case study methods could address these gaps.

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Transformative Branding is not an optional strategic choice, but an operational necessity driven by converging forces.

Generational transition (2.1) creates consumer and workforce cohorts that evaluate brands through values alignment, authenticity, and systemic impact rather than functional benefits or aspirational lifestyle associations. Gen Z's truth-seeking behaviours and Gen Alpha's AI-native worldview fundamentally reshape what brand credibility means. Regulatory and ESG pressures (2.2) transform sustainability from voluntary signalling to mandatory accountability, with legal liability for greenwashing and financial incentives for authentic ESG integration. The business case for sustainability is now robust. Digital platform evolution (2.3) redistributes cultural authority from brands to creators and communities, requiring brands to earn cultural citizenship through dialogue, collaboration, and platform-native engagement rather than broadcast control. Sustainability as innovation driver (2.4) positions environmental and social commitments not as constraints but as catalysts for operational efficiency, product innovation, and business model transformation. All this information held next to multiple case studies (2.5) illustrate that while transformation is necessary, execution determines success. Brands that achieve operational authenticity, stakeholder alignment, and heritage negotiation thrive (Patagonia), while those pursuing surface-level repositioning or creating marketing–operations gaps face credibility crises (Tesla polarisation, Jaguar resistance, Nike greenwashing accusations).

Together, the drivers create a context where brands must develop the theoretical capabilities outlined in Chapter 1: sensing cultural shifts, seizing transformation opportunities through collaborative coupling, and continuously transforming organisational practices through dynamic learning. Chapter 3 will examine how Transformative Branding theory specifically addresses the strategic challenges posed by these drivers.

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# Chapter 3: the strategic value of Transformative Branding

# Chapter 3: the strategic value of Transformative Branding



Building on the theoretical foundations established in Chapter 1 and the contextual drivers documented in Chapter 2, this chapter demonstrates how Transformative Branding delivers measurable strategic value for modern-day organisations. The convergence of generational value shifts, regulatory pressures, digital platform dynamics, and sustainability imperatives exposes systematic capability gaps in traditional brand management approaches. Transformative Branding addresses these gaps by providing mechanisms that connect external drivers to tangible organisational outcomes.

This chapter employs a Driver → Mechanism → Outcome analytical structure, examining how specific transformative branding mechanisms respond to each major driver identified in Chapter 2 and generate distinct forms of strategic value. The value chains presented in this chapter are analytical constructs that synthesise insights from theory (Chapter 1) and contextual drivers (Chapter 2), illustrating plausible pathways through which Transformative Branding can generate strategic value, not as abstract aspiration but as practical necessity for brands navigating modern-day challenges.

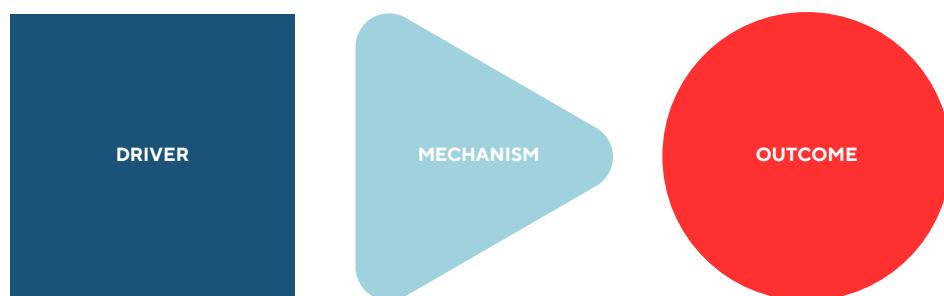
### 3.1 Introduction to value creation logic

As highlighted in the previous chapter modern-day brands face an unprecedented convergence of pressures. Together, these drivers create contexts where traditional brand management approaches, emphasising image control, consistency, and reputational focus, prove systematically inadequate. Transformative Branding responds to this convergence by providing capabilities that traditional approaches lack. It transforms operations, enables stakeholder co-creation, builds adaptive resilience, and integrates purpose into core strategy.

#### The Driver → Mechanism → Outcome framework

This chapter employs a structured analytical framework that connects each major driver from Chapter 2 with specific Transformative Branding mechanisms from Chapter 1, demonstrating how these mechanisms generate strategic outcomes. This framework elucidates the mechanistic pathways pathways through which Transformative Branding creates value (Figure 26).

Figure 26



*The driver-mechanism-outcome framework.*

Drivers are external and internal pressures reshaping brand contexts:

- Generational transitions (Gen Z and Gen Alpha value shifts)
- Regulatory and ESG pressures (mandatory accountability)
- Digital platform evolution (distributed cultural authority)
- Sustainability imperatives (systemic transformation requirements)

Mechanisms are Transformative Branding capabilities and practices that respond to drivers:

- Stakeholder co-creation and participatory design
- Dynamic learning and adaptive governance
- Collaborative coupling and platform-native engagement
- Authenticity through practice and governance-embedded purpose

Outcomes are strategic benefits generated when mechanisms successfully address drivers:

- Enhanced brand loyalty and inter-generational trust
- Organisational adaptability and reduced regulatory risk
- Cultural relevance and continuous innovation
- Long-term competitive advantage and stakeholder resilience

Each subsequent section examines one driver-mechanism-outcome chain in depth, drawing on theoretical concepts from Chapter 1, empirical evidence from Chapter 2, and integration of academic frameworks. Section 3.6 then synthesises these individual chains into a comprehensive new version of the "Transformative Branding value map" that reveals interdependencies and reinforcing cycles across mechanisms.

This value creation logic directly operationalises the dynamic capability framework from Chapter 1.5. Each mechanism reflects specific microfoundations. The Driver → Mechanism → Outcome framework thus provides a grounded demonstration of how the theoretical architecture from Chapter 1 addresses the practical challenges documented in Chapter 2.

## 3.2 Value chain 1

The first major driver reshaping brand contexts is generational transition. As outlined in Chapter 2.1, Generations Z and Alpha bring fundamentally different expectations to brand relationships. They prioritise values alignment, authentic activism, radical inclusivity, and participatory engagement over aspirational lifestyles or functional superiority. This creates value chain 1 (Figure 27).

Figure 27



Value chain 1.

### Generational characteristics

Generation Z exhibits distinct verification and participation behaviours. They independently validate brand claims, investigating supply chains via Reddit, assessing employee reviews on Glassdoor, and exposing contradictions through TikTok. Projection-reality gaps quickly destroy credibility. Diversity and inclusion are baseline expectations, not differentiators, and dialogue replaces broadcast communication. Gen Z favours micro-communities over mass culture, expecting brands to enable rather than dominate these spaces. Deloitte (2025) reports that 44% of Gen Z would decline assignments conflicting with their values, and over half expect employer action on climate and diversity, commitments that persist even under financial pressure.

For Gen Alpha, these tendencies intensify. As AI-natives whose identities co-evolve with algorithms (Jha, 2020; Ziatdinov & Cilliers, 2022), they judge authenticity less by human authorship and more by value alignment.

### Transformative mechanism: Stakeholder co-creation

Transformative Branding responds to these shifts by redistributing brand authorship through stakeholder co-creation:

- Participatory design beyond testing: brands engage youth in shaping products, campaigns, and strategy, operationalising Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) DART framework.
- Community-led branding: brands supply platforms and scaffolds that allow communities to define meaning (Sanders & Stappers 2008).
- Transparent value negotiation: openly acknowledging trade-offs, as Patagonia's Footprint Chronicles demonstrate, builds credibility through humility.
- Creator partnerships: micro-influencers become co-authors rather than paid endorsers, exemplifying Abidin's (2016) "calibrated amateurism."
- Iterative dialogue: continuous feedback loops, consistent with Morsing and Schultz's (2006) stakeholder-involvement strategy, ensure dialogue genuinely shapes outcomes.

These mechanisms correspond to the collaborative-coupling capability introduced in Chapter 1.3 and embody the sensing and seizing microfoundations described in Chapter 1.5.

## Strategic outcomes

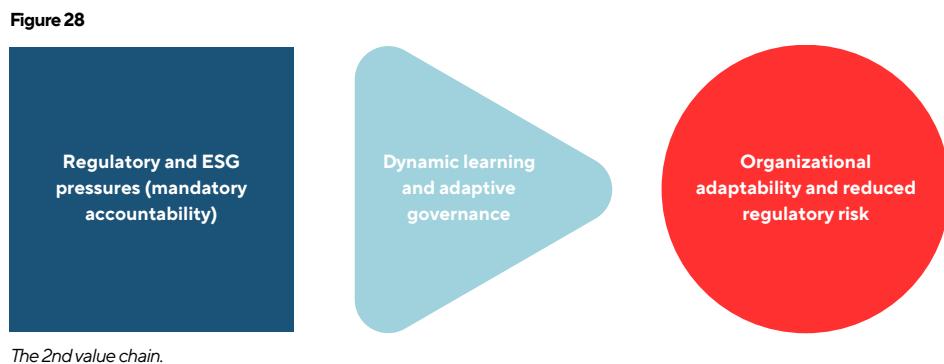
Effective co-creation enables emotional ownership, resilient loyalty, and inter-generational trust. Participatory engagement positions brands as legitimate cultural citizens (Witt & Baird 2018) while reducing cancellation risk through early stakeholder feedback. The process also seeds innovation pipelines, as youth partners surface emerging trends invisible to traditional management. These outcomes illustrate the value dimensions in Chapter 1.6: trust, cultural relevance, and sustained advantage.

## Illustrative evidence and theoretic grounding

Patagonia's collaboration with environmental activists demonstrates co-creation's durability: legitimacy stems from shared governance, not marketing. Conversely, Jaguar's unilateral repositioning alienated heritage communities (as documented in Chapter 2.5), lacking stakeholder coalitions. Nike shows partial success, strong creator programs but authenticity gaps where sustainability messaging exceeds operational practice. Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010; Andriof & Waddock, 2017), Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2014), participatory culture (Green & Jenkins, 2011), and authenticity research (Beverland 2008, 2009) collectively explain how distributed authorship transforms audiences into co-governors of brand meaning. See Chapter 3.6 for how co-creation reinforces learning, authenticity, and platform engagement.

### 3.3 Value chain 2

The second driver is the escalation of regulatory and ESG accountability. As discussed in chapter 2.2, sustainability has shifted from voluntary signalling to legally enforceable disclosure. Creating the second value chain, seen in Figure 28.



#### Evolving pressures

The EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (2024) subjects about 50 000 firms to standardised, assured reporting. Similar trends appear in SEC climate-risk disclosure rules and Germany's Supply-Chain Act. The ISSB framework promotes global convergence, while investor mandates integrate ESG screening into capital allocation. Meta-analysis by Aydoğmuş et al. (2022) links strong ESG performance to higher valuation and profitability, positioning ESG as a financial imperative.

#### Transformative mechanism: dynamic learning and adaptive governance.

Rather than one-off compliance, transformative brands institutionalise continuous learning:

- Adaptive governance: board-level ESG oversight and incentive alignment embed sustainability in decision-making.
- Regulatory sensing: ongoing horizon scanning anticipates rule changes.
- Operational transparency infrastructure. Data systems enable third-party verification across emissions, supply chains, and diversity metrics.
- Experimental pilots: design-thinking-based trials generate learning before scaling.
- Cross-functional integration: procurement, finance, HR, and operations share ESG responsibility.
- Stakeholder feedback and knowledge management: double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1997) captures insights and prevents repetition.

These mechanisms realise the transforming microfoundations of Teece's (2007; 2017) dynamic-capabilities framework.

#### Strategic outcomes

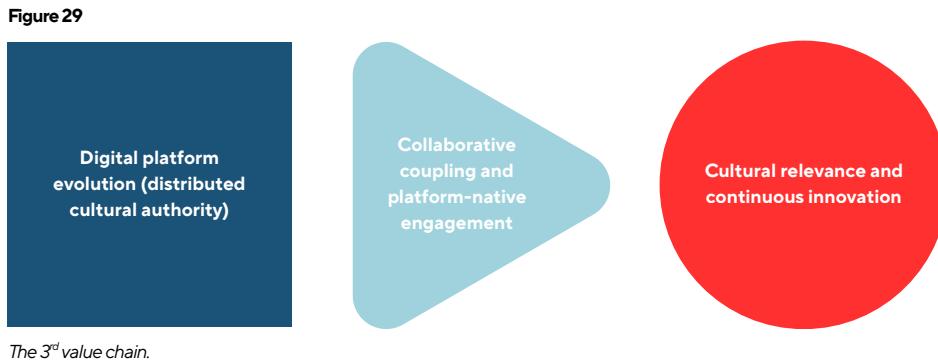
Dynamic learning enhances resilience and reduces legal risk through proactive compliance. It improves capital access and operational efficiency while converting regulation into an innovation driver (Nidumolu et al. 2009). Transparent adaptation also strengthens trust among verification-oriented cohorts.

### Illustrative evidence and theoretical grounding

Ford's EV transition, maintaining dual portfolios and realistic timelines, illustrates adaptive governance and learning. Patagonia's ownership restructuring and Footprint Chronicles showcase proactive transparency. Nike's sustainability reports, though advanced, still lag stakeholder expectations, revealing the cost of communication-heavy rather than learning-heavy ESG approaches. Dynamic Capabilities (Teece, 2007; 2017), Organisational Learning (Argyris & Schön, 1997), and Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 2004) explain how adaptability confers advantage. The Creating Shared Value framework (Porter & Kramer, 2011) shows how regulation can catalyse innovation. See Chapter 3.6 for dynamic learning's integrative role across mechanisms.

## 3.4 Value chain 3

The third value chain (Figure 29) is pushed by the driver digital platform evolution, and the creator economy redistribute cultural authority from institutions to individuals (Chapter 2.3). Brands must now earn cultural citizenship rather than purchase visibility.



### Platform characteristics

Gen Z's digital fluency demands platform-specific authenticity. Creator economies invert influence hierarchies, algorithms determine reach, and communities police inauthentic behaviour. NIQ (2024) finds 73% of Gen Z discover products via social media and over half purchase directly through those channels. Witt and Baird (2018) show that delayed or scripted corporate responses signal inauthenticity.

### Transformative mechanism: collaborative coupling (platform-native engagement)

Collaborative coupling helps with tackling problems by using the following techniques:

- Native participation: dedicated teams master each platform's norms (Holt, 2016).
- Creator partnership ecosystems: long-term, values-aligned collaborations replace transactional sponsorships, reflecting Abidin's (2016) authenticity model.
- Community co-creation: beyond user-generated content, communities co-develop products and campaigns (Sanders & Stappers, 2008).
- Algorithm literacy and agility: content teams balance optimisation with integrity.
- Cultural-intelligence systems: social listening detects emerging concerns and vernaculars.

These correspond to the seizing microfoundations in Chapter 1.5 and extend collaborative coupling from Chapter 1.3 into digital contexts.

### Strategic outcomes

Platform-native collaboration increases sustained cultural relevance, organic algorithmic amplification, authentic advocacy, rapid feedback cycles, and community support during crises. Such relationships are difficult to imitate, meeting Barney's (1991) VRIN criteria.

### Illustrative evidence and theoretical grounding

Patagonia's digital presence amplifies grassroots movements rather than broadcasting ads, earning credibility that paid media cannot buy. Contrastingly, performative activism campaigns fail when detached from genuine community involvement (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Participatory-culture theory (Green & Jenkins, 2011), network and social-capital research (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 2004), and cultural-intermediary studies (Cronin, 2004) illuminate how distributed networks co-create value. Dependencies with co-creation and authenticity-through-practice are elaborated in Chapter 3.6.

## 3.5 Value chain 4

The fourth driver, sustainability, has become both a moral and strategic necessity (Chapter 2.4). Nidumolu et al. (2009) describe five stages of integration from compliance to systemic change. Gen Z consumers show willingness to pay premiums per First Insight (2020), and the majority verify claims before buying. Values persist despite economic stress (Deloitte, 2025), making authenticity decisive. Giving us value chain 4 (Figure 30).



The 4th and final value chain.

### Transformative mechanism: authenticity through practice

Authenticity through practice can be achieved by following the following principles:

- Governance-level integration: ownership and board structures embed environmental purpose (e.g., Patagonia trust model; B-Corp charters).
- Supply-chain partnerships: long-term collaboration and transparent mapping (Tony's Open Chain).
- Lifecycle and circular design: repairability, take-back, and material innovation.
- Operational decarbonisation: renewable energy, efficient logistics, and low-carbon materials.
- Transparent impact reporting: third-party verification reduces greenwashing risk.
- Systemic collaboration: cross-industry coalitions and policy advocacy.
- Purpose-driven innovation and culture: sustainability literacy and empowered employees sustain momentum.

These mechanisms express the authenticity-through-practice pillar (Chapter 1.4) and the transforming microfoundations (Chapter 1.5), echoing Beverland's (2009) view of authenticity as embodied behaviour.

### Strategic outcomes

Operational authenticity contributes to resilient trust, regulatory leadership, cost efficiency, innovation-based differentiation, talent attraction, and superior long-term performance (Clark et al. 2015; Aydoğmuş et al. 2022). Because operations are hard to copy, advantages persist beyond marketing cycles.

### Illustrative evidence and theoretical grounding

Patagonia perfectly exemplifies embodied authenticity through governance, supply chain, and lifecycle programs. Ford's capital-intensive EV shift similarly grounds messaging in action. By contrast, brands accused of greenwashing, especially fast-fashion firms, demonstrate how messaging that outruns operations erodes equity. Jaguar's failed repositioning highlights the peril of surface-level sustainability rhetoric unsupported by capabilities. Authenticity research (Beverland 2005–2009, Beveland & Farrelly, 2009), Creating Shared Value (Porter & Kramer, 2011), Dynamic Capabilities (Teece, 2007; 2017), the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), and Institutional Theory together explain how embodied sustainability creates rare, valuable, inimitable resources. Chapter 3.6 details how operational authenticity enables co-creation and platform credibility.

## 3.6 Cross-driver synthesis and the Transformative Branding value map

The four driver-mechanism-outcome chains discussed in Chapters 3.2 – 3.5 do not function independently. Together, they form an interconnected system that explains how Transformative Branding produces durable, self-reinforcing strategic value. This section consolidates these relationships into an integrated framework, the Transformative Branding value map, illustrating how external drivers, organisational mechanisms, and strategic outcomes interlock through continuous feedback and learning.

### Interdependencies across mechanisms

While each mechanism primarily addresses one external driver, in practice they overlap and strengthen one another:

Co-creation enhances learning: stakeholder co-creation (Chapter 3.2) supplies first-hand insight into emerging expectations, feeding data and perspective into dynamic learning systems (Chapter 3.3). When Gen Z and Gen Alpha participants co-create products or campaigns, they act as early sensors of cultural and regulatory change, allowing organisations to adjust policies and governance before issues escalate.

Learning enables authenticity: dynamic learning capabilities (Chapter 3.3) are fundamental for maintaining operational authenticity (Chapter 3.5). As sustainability standards and disclosure regulations evolve, adaptive learning ensures brands update practices, accordingly, closing the gap between presentations and reality. Without continuous learning, even sincere commitments risk obsolescence or perceived hypocrisy.

Platform coupling depends on authenticity: collaborative platform engagement (Chapter 3.4) only succeeds when grounded in authentic practice (Chapter 3.5). Creator communities and digital audiences rapidly expose inconsistencies between communicated purpose and operational behaviour, as seen in public reactions to greenwashing scandals on TikTok and Reddit. Authentic operations thus become the precondition for credible participation in digital culture.

Authenticity enables co-creation: conversely, operational authenticity establishes the trust that makes stakeholder co-creation possible. Youth collaborators engage meaningfully only when they perceive genuine respect for their agency rather than instrumental use for marketing optics. In this way, authenticity and co-creation form a reinforcing pair, one sustains credibility, the other sustains relevance.

Learning informs platform strategy: dynamic learning also guides platform engagement. Algorithmic environments and social norms change rapidly; brands with institutionalised sensing and learning can adapt tone, content, and participation strategies ahead of cultural drift.

Platform feedback accelerates learning: finally, digital platforms generate continuous feedback. Comments, shares, and community dialogues reveal stakeholder sentiment in real time, creating a rapid-response learning channel that complements formal monitoring systems. Together, these reciprocal loops create a living system of adaptation.

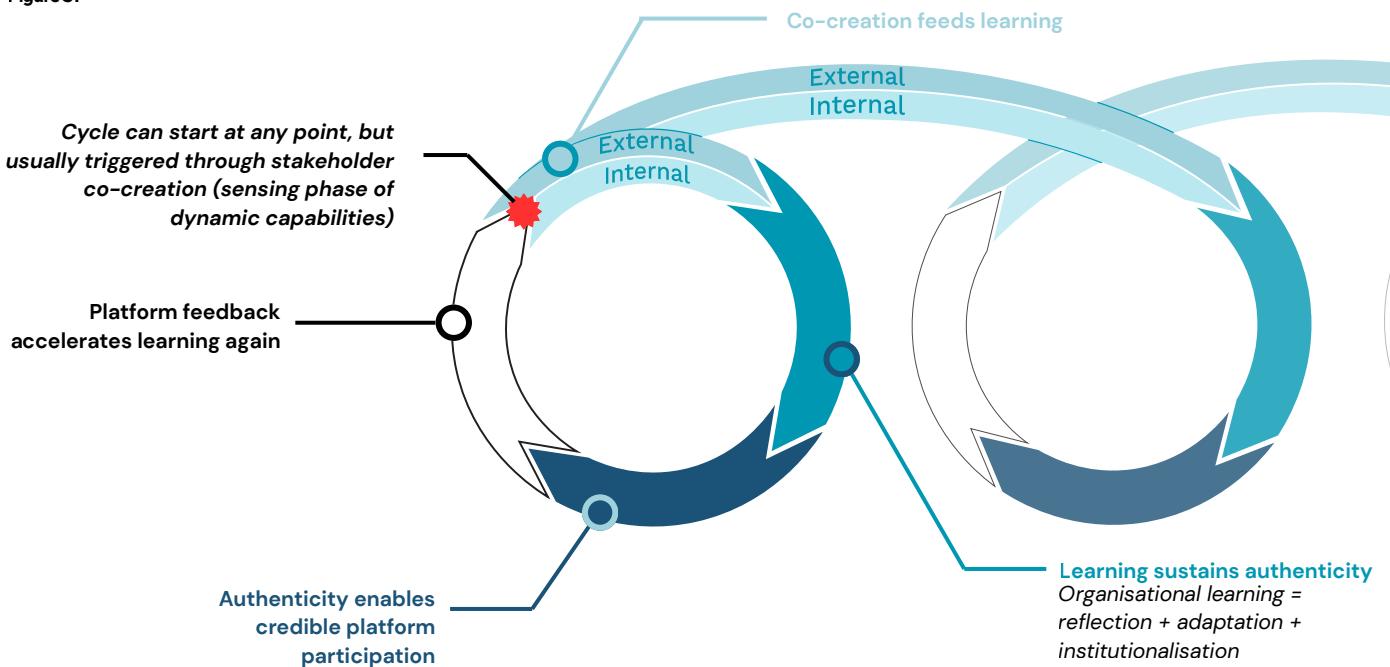
## The Transformative Branding value map

The outcomes produced by each mechanism also amplify one another over time:

- Trust enables relevance: Inter-generational trust, built through co-creation and authentic practice, allows brands to achieve cultural citizenship and long-term presence in digital spaces.
- Adaptability sustains advantage: Organizational learning and adaptive governance ensure that advantage endures despite regulatory, technological, or societal turbulence.
- Innovation strengthens resilience: Continuous innovation, originating from co-creation and platform collaboration, helps brands pivot during crises or disruptions.
- Loyalty reduces risk: Loyal stakeholder communities act as buffers during reputational challenges, offering constructive critique rather than immediate disengagement.
- Relevance attracts talent: Cultural resonance appeals to purpose-driven employees, strengthening internal commitment and accelerating further innovation.
- Advantage compounds trust: The resources and legitimacy gained from sustained advantage enable deeper investment in participatory and sustainability programs, creating a cycle of escalating credibility.

Synthesising these interconnections yields the Transformative Branding Value Map (Figure 31), a four-stage framework that captures the compounding logic of transformation within feedback loops. The system is cyclical where outcomes reshape external environments: pioneering brands raise industry standards, influence regulation, alter platform algorithms, and normalise transparency. Simultaneously, outcomes reinforce mechanisms internally: trust from early co-creation enables more ambitious participation; long-term advantage funds deeper sustainability transformation; cultural relevance attracts new creator partners; and adaptability accelerates responses to emerging drivers. Over time, the feedback generates compounding advantage, a flywheel of transformation that is difficult for competitors to imitate.

Figure 31



The Transformative Branding value map.

## Capability integration: the dynamic-capability core

At the centre of the value map lies the dynamic-capability system outlined in Chapter 1.5, integrating all mechanisms into a coherent engine of adaptation:

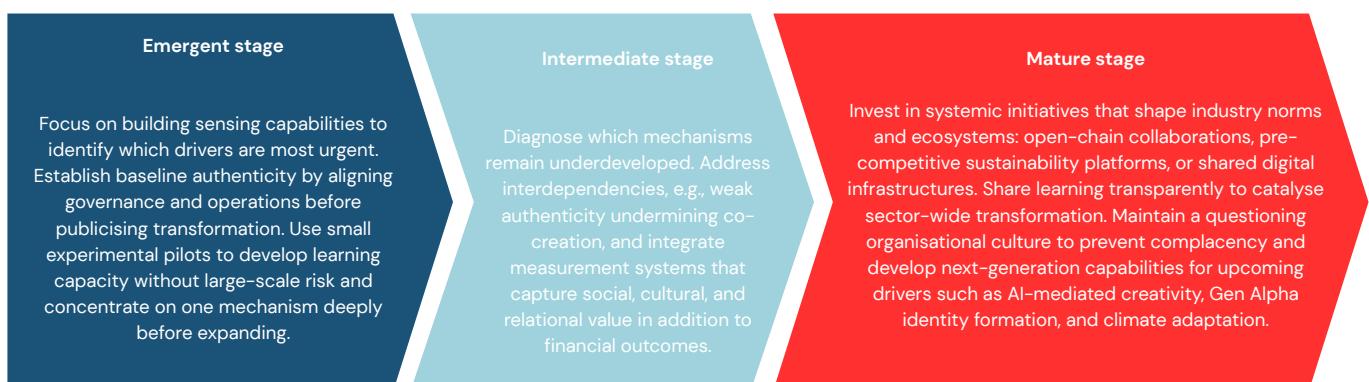
- Sensing capabilities, cultural intelligence, worldview sensitivity, and regulatory monitoring, detect shifts across all four drivers, providing early warnings and insight.
- Seizing capabilities, co-creation platforms, collaborative coupling, and stakeholder alignment, mobilise cross-functional responses, translating insights into coordinated action.
- Transforming capabilities, dynamic learning, adaptive governance, and asset reconfiguration, continuously reshape structures, ensuring mechanisms evolve with context.

This triadic core explains why Transformative Branding produces sustained rather than temporary advantages. While individual programs can be copied, the interdependent capability system, rooted in culture, governance, stakeholder relationships, and institutional memory, remains uniquely inimitable.

## Application guidance: strategic priorities

The value map also serves as a practical guide for organisations at different maturity levels (seen in Figure 32).

Figure 32



*The three stages of application of Transformative Branding.*

In essence, the Transformative Branding value map portrays a living system in which sensing, seizing, and transforming capabilities connect co-creation, learning, collaboration, and authenticity into a single adaptive engine. Through continuous feedback among these mechanisms, brands evolve from image managers into active agents of societal and cultural transformation, achieving not only resilience and innovation but also legitimacy and trust across generations.

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Transformative Branding delivers measurable strategic value by resolving challenges that traditional brand management cannot. Using a Driver → Mechanism → Outcome logic, we showed how transformative capabilities respond to modern-day pressures and translate into durable competitive advantages. The relationships highlighted are not 1-to-1, the mechanisms are now linked to the most prominent driver they tackle but are applicable to multiple.

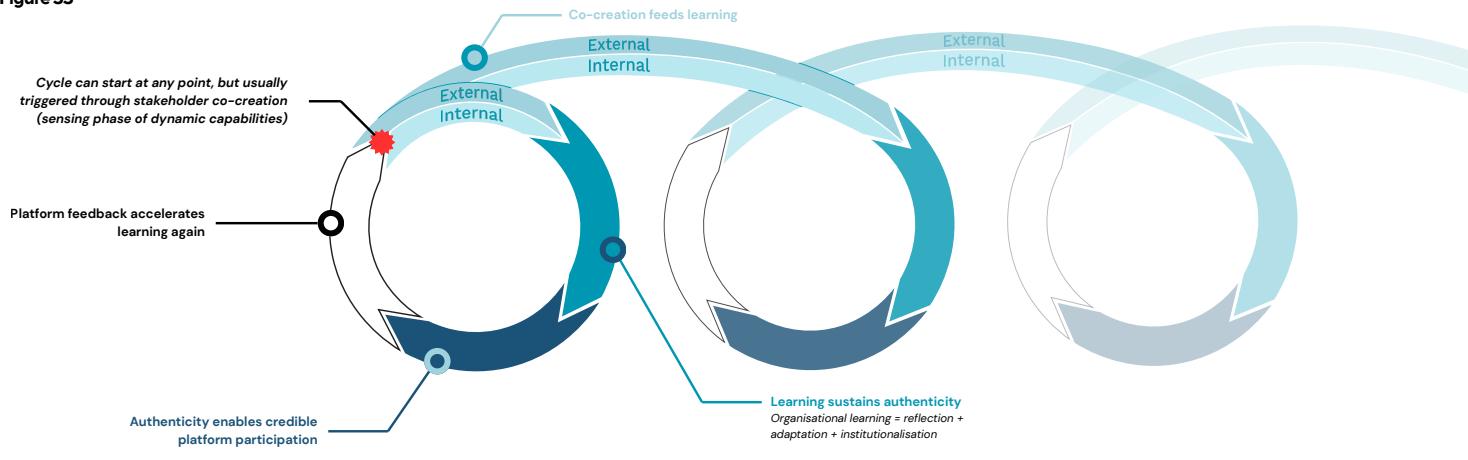
### Summary of value-creation pathways

- (1) Generational change → Stakeholder co-creation → Inter-generational loyalty. Gen Z/Alpha prioritise values alignment, verification, inclusivity, and participation (Chapter 2.1). Co-creation mechanisms, participatory design, community-led branding, transparent trade-offs, and creator partnerships, redistribute authorship and build psychological ownership, cultural citizenship, and early-warning capacity. Patagonia illustrates trust built through authentic participation; Jaguar highlights the costs of unilateral repositioning.
- (2) Regulatory & ESG pressures → Dynamic learning → Organisational adaptability. The shift to mandatory, assured sustainability reporting (Chapter 2.2) makes one-off compliance obsolete. Adaptive governance, regulatory sensing, verifiable data systems, cross-functional integration, and piloting embed continuous learning, reducing legal risk, improving capital access, and turning regulation into an innovation catalyst. Ford's staged EV transition exemplifies this; communication-operations gaps (e.g., where reporting outpaces practice) reveal vulnerabilities.
- (3) Digital platforms → Collaborative coupling → Cultural relevance and innovation. Platform dynamics and the creator economy (Chapter 2.3) reward native participation and distributed authorship. Values-aligned creator ecosystems, community co-creation, algorithm literacy, and agile production generate authentic advocacy, organic reach, rapid iteration, and crisis buffers. Performative activism fails when detached from communities.
- (4) Sustainability imperatives → Authenticity-through-practice → Long-term advantage. With consumers verifying claims and regulation tightening (Chapter 2.4), credibility depends on embodied practice: governance-level purpose, supply-chain partnerships, lifecycle design, operational decarbonisation, and transparent impact reporting. These hard-to-imitate capabilities produce resilience, differentiation, efficiency, talent attraction, and superior long-run performance. Patagonia's ownership and supply-chain transparency exemplify durability; greenwashing cases show the opposite.

## Integration

The Transformative Branding value map (Figure 33) shows these pathways interlock. Mechanisms reinforce one another, co-creation feeds learning; learning sustains authenticity; authenticity enables credible platform coupling; platform feedback accelerates learning. Outcomes also compound; trust enables relevance; adaptability sustains advantage; innovation strengthens resilience; loyalty reduces risk; relevance attracts talent; accumulated advantage funds deeper participation. These feedback loops reshape external contexts (raising industry norms, informing regulation, shifting platform visibility) and deepen internal capabilities, creating compounding rather than linear value over time. At the centre is the dynamic-capability core: sensing (cultural intelligence and regulatory monitoring), seizing (co-creation platforms, collaborative coupling, stakeholder alignment), and transforming (adaptive governance, double-loop learning, asset reconfiguration). This integrative system, not any single program, explains sustained advantage and is difficult to imitate because it rests on organisational culture, governance, stakeholder relationships, and institutional memory.

Figure 33



The Transformative Branding value map.

## Looking ahead

In the future we will see a generational handover, regulatory tightening, platform evolution, climate and social crises, AI-mediated verification, and broader systemic risks will raise the bar further. Brands without co-creation, dynamic learning, platform-native collaboration, and operational authenticity will incur rising compliance costs, credibility loss, and cultural irrelevance. Transformative capabilities will become baseline requirements for competitive viability.

Transformative Branding is not an aspiration but a strategic necessity. In environments where authenticity is independently verifiable, co-creation is expected, purpose integration is mandated, and adaptation is continuous, the integrated system outlined here delivers inter-generational loyalty and trust, organisational adaptability and risk reduction, cultural relevance and innovation, and long-term competitive advantage and resilience. Together with the theoretical foundations in Chapter 1 and the contextual analysis in Chapter 2, this chapter positions Transformative Branding as the most viable approach for twenty-first-century brand strategy. Organisations that build these capabilities will thrive; those that cling to control-centric, campaign-led models will struggle to attract stakeholders, maintain legitimacy, adapt, or sustain advantage.

But its need is yet to be reflected in the presence of tools that harbour it and give brands the opportunity to utilise it. This gap in the market of transformation frameworks presents an opening for intervention. In response, the next chapter introduces the development of a workshop that centralises Transformative Branding and enables brands to practically cultivate the capabilities required for authentic and sustainable transformation.

# Chapter 4: Transformative Branding workshop

# Chapter 4: Transformative Branding workshop



This chapter translates the conceptual foundations of Transformative Branding into a concrete, applicable form: a physical methodology that organisations can use to develop and exercise their transformative capabilities. In previous chapters, Transformative Branding was positioned as a dynamic capability that helps brands continuously sense change, seize opportunities, and transform in ways that remain authentic, sustainable, and responsive to generational and societal shifts. Yet, without an actionable format, such a capability risks remaining abstract or dependent on external experts. This chapter therefore proposes the workshop as the “product” of the research: a structured, repeatable, and participatory approach that embeds Transformative Branding into organisational practice.

## 4.1 Transformative Branding: designing the workshop

Transformative Branding requires organisations to actively surface tensions, negotiate meaning across internal and external perspectives, and collaboratively define strategic directions for change. These activities are inherently participatory, reflective, and co-creative. Traditional research and analysis tools (e.g., interviews, surveys, strategy decks) do not sufficiently enable this kind of multi-perspective, dynamic sensemaking. A workshop format, especially one grounded in design and organisational theory, was therefore selected because it:

- Creates a shared physical and cognitive space for cross-functional reflection;
- Enables simultaneous sensing of vision, culture, and image;
- Facilitates collective ownership over insights and decisions;
- Provides a repeatable structure that organisations can internalise as a capability.

The workshop is thus not merely a deliverable, but a strategic intervention format that operationalises the microfoundations of Transformative Branding.

### Theoretical foundations

The design of the workshop needs to be grounded in two interrelated theoretical foundations that structure both content and method: Dynamic Capability Theory and Responsible Design Thinking. These theories jointly explain how organisations sense change, how they interpret and act on it, and how they do so responsibly. The already mentioned Dynamic Capability Theory (Teece, 2007; Teece et al., 1997) provides the architectural logic of the workshop as it is a core pillar of Transformative Branding. Using this methodology during the workshop teaches the participants how their organisation can adapt to shifting societal, cultural, and market environments through the three core activities with minimal verbal explanation:

- Sensing: identifying changes in societal expectations, internal culture, stakeholder relationships, and generational shifts;
- Seizing: evaluating these insights and determining which opportunities or tensions are strategically meaningful;
- Transforming: embedding new behaviours, practices, governance structures, and narratives into the organisation.

This framework dictates the three-phase structure of the workshop and ensures that the method aligns with the central mechanisms through which organisations build transformative capacity. Responsible Design Thinking (Baldassarre et al., 2024) shapes the facilitation philosophy and ensures that the method centralises responsible and inclusive outcomes. It emphasises:

- Inclusivity: Incorporating diverse voices and perspectives across the organisation;
- Reflexivity: Encouraging participants to question assumptions and consider long-term effects;
- Long-term responsibility: Avoiding short-term branding solutions in favour of structural change;
- Value alignment: Ensuring that strategies resonate with societal and intergenerational values.

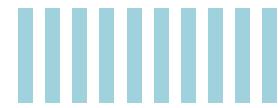
RDT provides the ethical grounding that complements the analytical and strategic logic of Dynamic Capabilities. Together, these frameworks ensure that the workshop is strategically oriented, analytically rigorous, and ethically responsible.

## Requirements

Based on the theory, preliminary conversations with experts, and early concept iterations, the workshop needed to fulfil multiple core requirements:

1. Teach the core logic of Transformative Branding: for organisations to cultivate Transformative Branding as a dynamic capability, participants must understand how sensing, seizing, and transforming work in practice. However, this must be done without assuming theoretical expertise, consistent with Responsible Design Thinking's call for accessibility and inclusivity.
2. Surface and visualise organisational tensions: mapping tensions between what the brand claims, embodies, and is perceived as is essential for identifying transformation opportunities.
3. Make tacit knowledge explicit: many cultural tensions or brand inconsistencies are "felt" but undocumented, this workshop should surface participants' tacit knowledge, including thoughts, feelings, and unstated assumptions.
4. Enable cross-perspective integration: misalignment between vision, culture, and image is structurally impossible to diagnose from a single perspective. Integration is essential to reveal blind spots and contradictions. Your expert interviews emphasised "cross-disciplinary mixing" as a must.
5. Support psychological safety and reduce social filtering: the workshop design must counteract social filtering (because of possible hierarchical pressures) through anonymous inputs, smaller group work, and structured prompts
6. Be interactive and generative: branding as value co-creation requires participatory processes. Early concept tests showed that passive formats limit insight depth, while generative activities enable richer lived-experience input and shared ownership.
7. Support collective ownership and agency: for the transformation to be legitimate and sustainable, outcomes must arise from participants' insights, not imposed top-down. This also reduces managerial blind spots and increases internal mandate.
8. Facilitate prioritisation and decision-making: sensing alone is insufficient; organisations need help identifying which tensions are strategically meaningful and feasible to address.
9. Enable translation from insight to strategic action: without translation, the workshop becomes reflective but not transformative.
10. Be low-threshold and cognitively manageable: participants often lack branding or theoretical expertise. The workshop must reduce cognitive load through simple tools (V-C-I mapping, reflection prompts, clear phases).
11. Create a repeatable organisational practice: a capability only exists if it can be repeated and embedded. The workshop must therefore be simple enough to run internally, without external experts, supporting longitudinal capability building.
12. Align with Responsible Design Thinking principles: Transformative Branding explicitly avoids opportunistic rebranding. The workshop therefore must structure reflection on societal impact, generational expectations, and ethical implications of brand decisions.

Collectively, these requirements translate abstract Transformative Branding principles into concrete instructional design decisions, ensuring that the workshop remains both theoretically grounded and practically accessible.



## Workshop creation

To meet the requirements that were set up and to integrate the Transformative Branding theory into a three-phase structure aligned with Dynamic Capability Theory the workshop would need the following structure, the first part seen in Figure 34.

Figure 34

### Opening & framing the session

**Purpose:** establish safety, prepare participants cognitively, and frame the workshop in accessible terms.

**Activity structure:** warm welcome + explanation of purpose, introductions (name, age, role, years of experience, warm-up question), emphasis on no right or wrong answers and equal contribution.

**Design choices:** use plain, non-theoretical language to avoid early cognitive overload, Facilitator models openness and vulnerability to reduce hierarchy barriers, Start with predictable, low-effort interactions to ease participants into the process.

**Design rationale:** a slower, guided opening helps participants feel safe, reduces social filtering, and prepares them for honest introspection

**Requirements addressed:** 3, 5, 7, 10, 12

### Theoretical explanation

**Purpose:** make Transformative Branding understandable without overwhelming participants.

**Activity structure:** timed explanation of sensing-seizing-transforming, visual explanation instead of dense text, examples from familiar brands, emphasis that no expertise is required to participate.

**Design choices:** keep theory brief to maintain cognitive manageability, use visuals and relatable examples to increase comprehension, deliver theory right before application to strengthen retention.

**Design rationale:** to cultivate Transformative Branding as a dynamic capability, participants must grasp its core logic. However, Responsible Design Thinking demands accessibility: theory should enable participation, not intimidate.

**Requirements addressed:** 1, 4, 10, 11, 12



## Workshop creation

Following the first two steps of the workshop to set up, the actual value creation of the workshop can begin, starting with the first two phases of the Dynamic Capability Theory (Figure 35)

Figure 35

### Sensing phase – surface tensions using V-C-I

**Purpose:** reveal misalignments between Vision, Culture, and Image; make tacit knowledge explicit.

**Activity structure:** individual reflections, group clustering into Vision / Culture / Image, collective identification of tensions, prioritisation of tensions.

**Design choices:** individual reflections first to minimise hierarchy effects and surface private insights, democratic prioritisation of tensions to reinforce shared ownership.

**Design rationale:** jumping directly into discussion produced filtered, shallow input. Individual reflection captures richer lived experience before group dynamics interfere. V-C-I mapping structures the sensing phase rigorously and visibly.

**Requirements addressed:** 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10

#### The Vision–Culture–Image (V–C–I) model

This model functions as the analytical backbone specifically for the sensing phase. It enables participants to surface misalignments between:

- Vision – organisational aspirations and strategic intent;
- Culture – internal norms, behaviours, and identity-as-lived;
- Image – external perceptions from customers, communities, and partners.

These misalignments, further referred to as tension fields, represent the points where transformation is most needed and most consequential. V–C–I in the sensing phase was chosen because:

- It intuitively structures reflections while allowing depth.
- It reveals misalignments that function as tension fields (core to Transformative Branding).
- It supports cross-perspective integration.
- Ensures that the first phase is theoretically robust.

Hatch & Schultz (2001)

### Seizing phase – prioritising and interpreting tensions

**Purpose:** deepen understanding of selected tension fields and ideate on potential responses.

**Activity structure:** create mixed-expertise groups, group ideation on selected tensions, presentations of insights and proposed directions.

**Design choices:** mixed groups break silos and introduce cognitive diversity, short structured canvases guide exploration without solution jumping, presentations enable cross-pollination and collective sensemaking.

**Design rationale:** transformative Branding requires interpreting sensed tensions as opportunities for strategic action. Structured group work balances creativity with analytical thinking, strengthening the seizing capability.

**Requirements addressed:** 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8

Following phases of the workshop.



## Workshop creation

The final stages of the workshop (Figure 36) are about converting ideas to action, ending with an open reflection to conclude findings and create a follow up plan.

Figure 35

### Transforming phase – translate tensions into action

**Purpose:** create an actionable transformation timeline with identified barriers and enablers.

**Activity structure:** collective timeline creation: goals, sequencing, steps, identify barriers and enablers, consolidate roadmap.

**Design choices:** introduce barriers/enablers only after goals are set to avoid pessimism dominating early thinking, scaffold strategic thinking with sequential facilitator questions, use a physical timeline to support collaborative sensemaking.

**Design rationale:** this phase ensures that identified tensions translate into actionable outcomes, by translating insights into actionable, time-bound pathways. It also reinforces Transformative Branding as a dynamic capability, capable of bridging sensing → seizing → transforming in one coherent flow.

**Requirements addressed:** 1, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12

### Ending & consolidation

**Purpose:** close with clarity, shared understanding, and reflection.

**Activity structure:** each participant shares reflections and takeaways, facilitator summarises outputs, outline next steps and follow-up actions.

**Design choices:** provide a concise summary of outputs to reduce ambiguity, include both spoken and optional written reflection for inclusivity, clarify next steps to ensure continuity after the workshop.

**Design rationale:** the end of the workshop is key for meaning-making and commitment. Reflection enhances psychological ownership, while clear next steps maintain organisational legitimacy and momentum.

**Requirements addressed:** 3, 7, 9, 11, 12

Final phases of the workshop.



## Material creation

The workshop (final version in Appendix 3) required not only a coherent structure but also a carefully designed set of materials that could operationalise Transformative Branding in practice. Because the method depends on sensemaking, collective reflection, and the surfacing of tacit knowledge, traditional slide-based presentations or verbal facilitation alone would be insufficient. Instead, a physical, poster-driven system was developed as the interactive backbone of the workshop. These materials function as cognitive scaffolds that support each phase of sensing, seizing, and transforming while remaining accessible to participants with varying levels of branding or theoretical expertise. This process is inherently visual, participatory, and iterative.

Therefore, the material system needed to:

- Make abstract constructs (e.g., vision, culture, image, tensions, capabilities) visible and tangible.
- Support co-creation rather than one-way facilitation.
- Reduce cognitive load through structured visual layouts.
- Enable reflection, remixing, and movement of insights across phases.
- Create a shared focal point in the room that equalises status differences.
- Provide a repeatable artefact that organisations can use beyond a single session.

A physical, poster-based format meets these requirements more effectively than digital or verbally led alternatives. Posters provide structure without constraining creativity, while sticky notes offer an inherently low-threshold input method accessible to all participants.

In contrast to sticky notes on blank walls or informal whiteboards, the poster suite was intentionally structured to guide participants through Transformative Branding's microfoundations. Each canvas functions as both a conceptual model and a collaborative tool, reducing facilitator intervention and giving ownership to participants (Figure 37).

Figure 37

**1. Tangibility and shared cognition**

Large A0 posters act as collective "thinking surfaces." Their scale creates visibility across the room and invites movement, collaboration, and physical interaction.



This is crucial for:

- Lowering hierarchy dynamics,
- Enabling distributed cognition,
- Helping participants externalise tacit knowledge, and
- Allowing teams to "see the whole system" at once.

The posters turn Transformative Branding into a lived experience rather than a conceptual lecture.

**2. Low-barrier, democratic participation**

Sticky notes on open white space allow:

- Introverted and junior participants to contribute without speaking,
- Multiple interpretations and voices to coexist,
- Clustering, reframing, and rearranging,
- Visually identifying patterns, contradictions, and emerging tensions.

This directly supports Responsible Design Thinking principles of inclusivity and reflexivity.

**3. Cognitive scaffolding through visual hierarchy**

Each poster was designed with:

- Clear headings,
- Sufficient negative space,
- Iconography that reinforces meaning,
- Left-to-right and top-to-bottom logic,
- Prompt clusters that break complex thinking into digestible steps.

This lowers cognitive load (Requirement 10) and allows participants to focus on meaning rather than format.

**4. Repeatability and internal capability building**

By keeping posters simple, modular, and theoretically grounded, organisations can:

- Run the workshop internally without external expertise,
- Gradually build a Transformative Branding capability,
- Integrate posters into strategic cycles (annual reflection, team off-sites, onboarding).

The physicality reinforces memory and supports longitudinal use.

Overview reasoning for selection of posters and sticky notes.

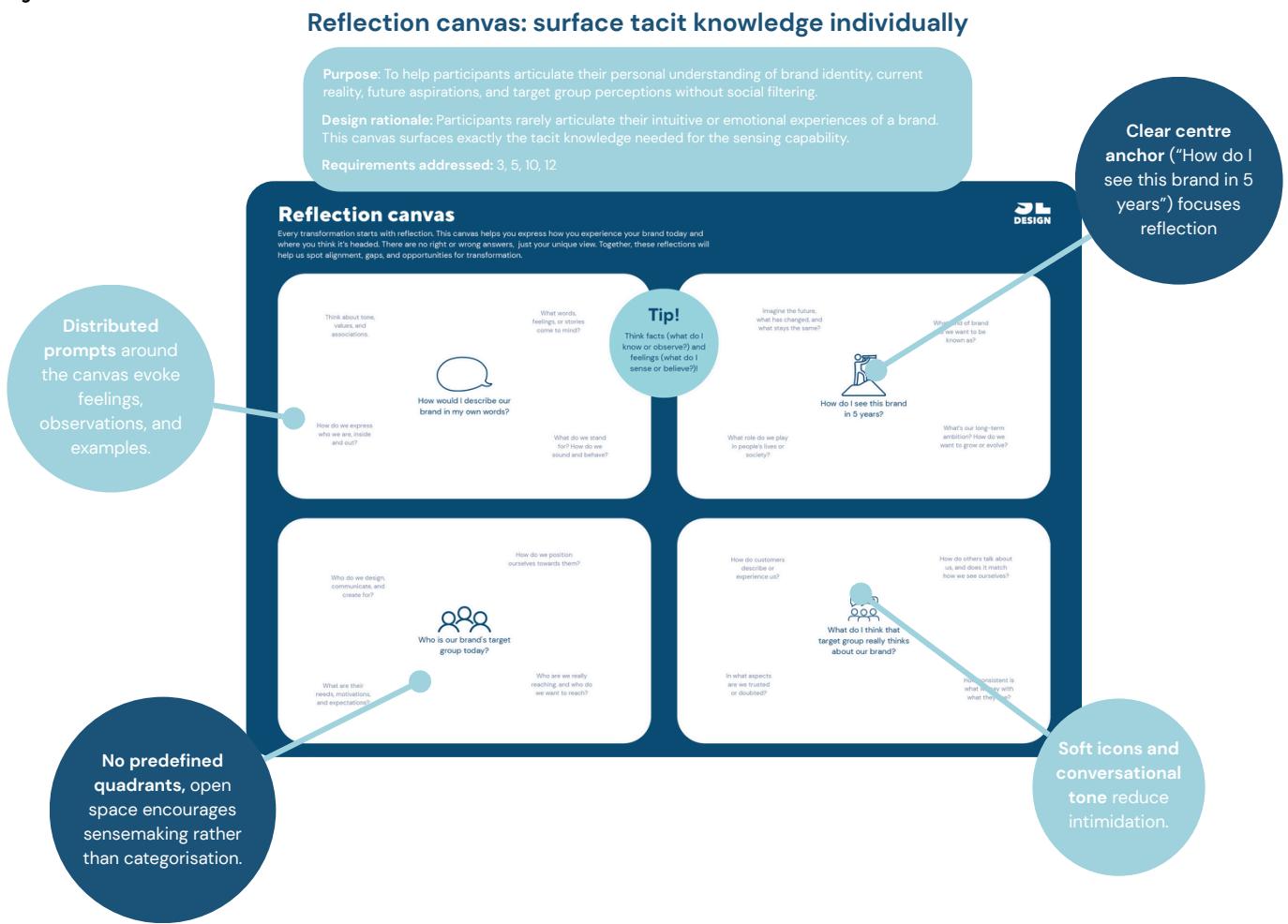
## Poster design

The visual materials consist of four AO posters aligned with the phases of the workshop and scaffolded by a brief explanatory slide deck:

- Reflection Canvas (Individual sensing)
- V-C-I Canvas (Collective sensing)
- Tension Field Ideation Canvas (Seizing)
- Transformation Timeline (Transforming)

Each canvas is described (Figures 38, 39, 40, 41), including its design intent, structural logic, and theoretical alignment. To prepare participants the first poster was redesigned into a preparation booklet. The booklet and canvases, without design elements, can be found in Appendix 4 (Figure A1, A2, A3, A4, A5).

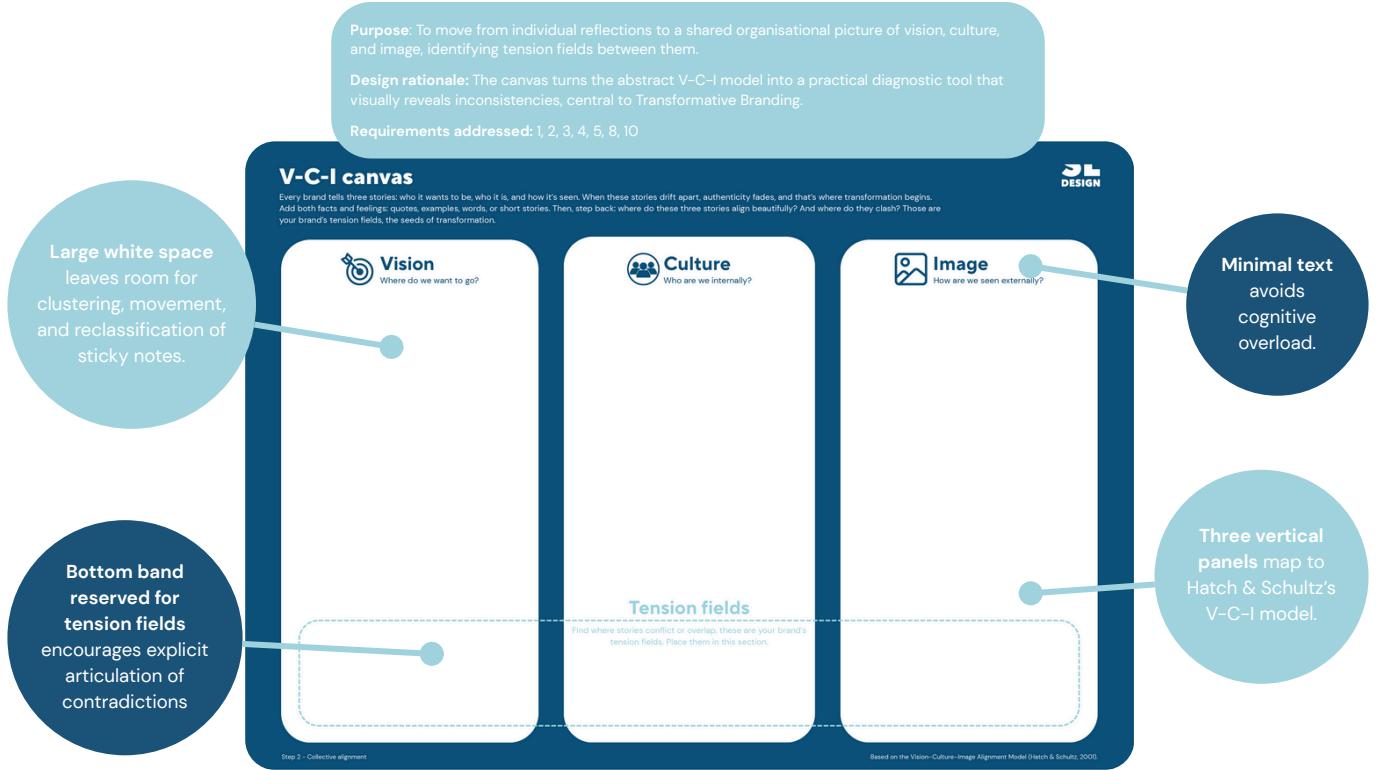
Figure 38



The reflection canvas with design elements.

Figure 39

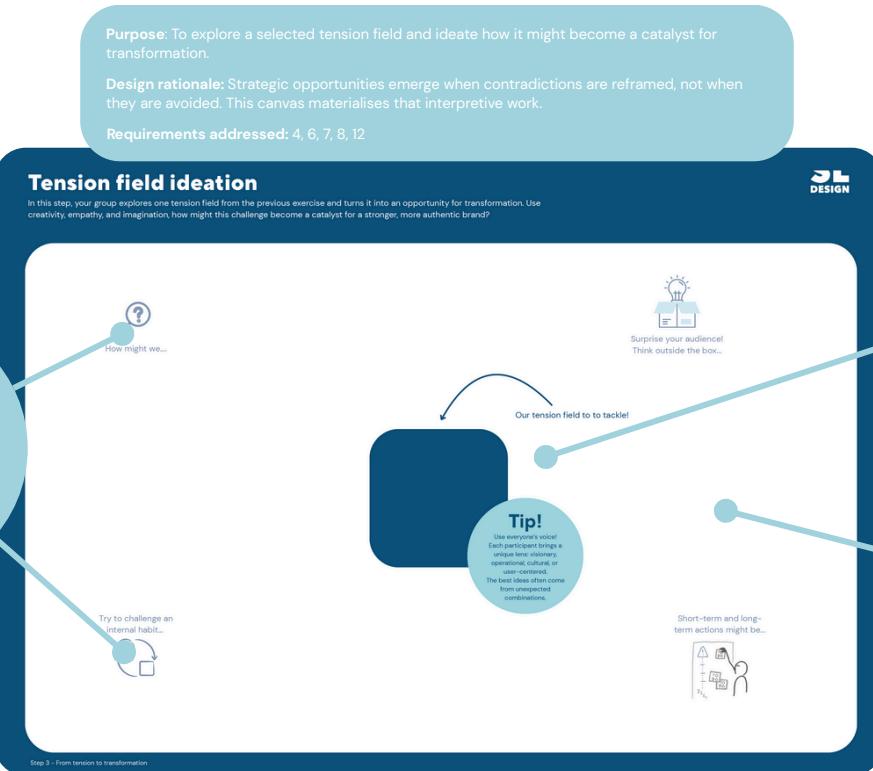
### V-C-I canvas: structure the sensing phase



The V-C-I canvas with design elements.

Figure 40

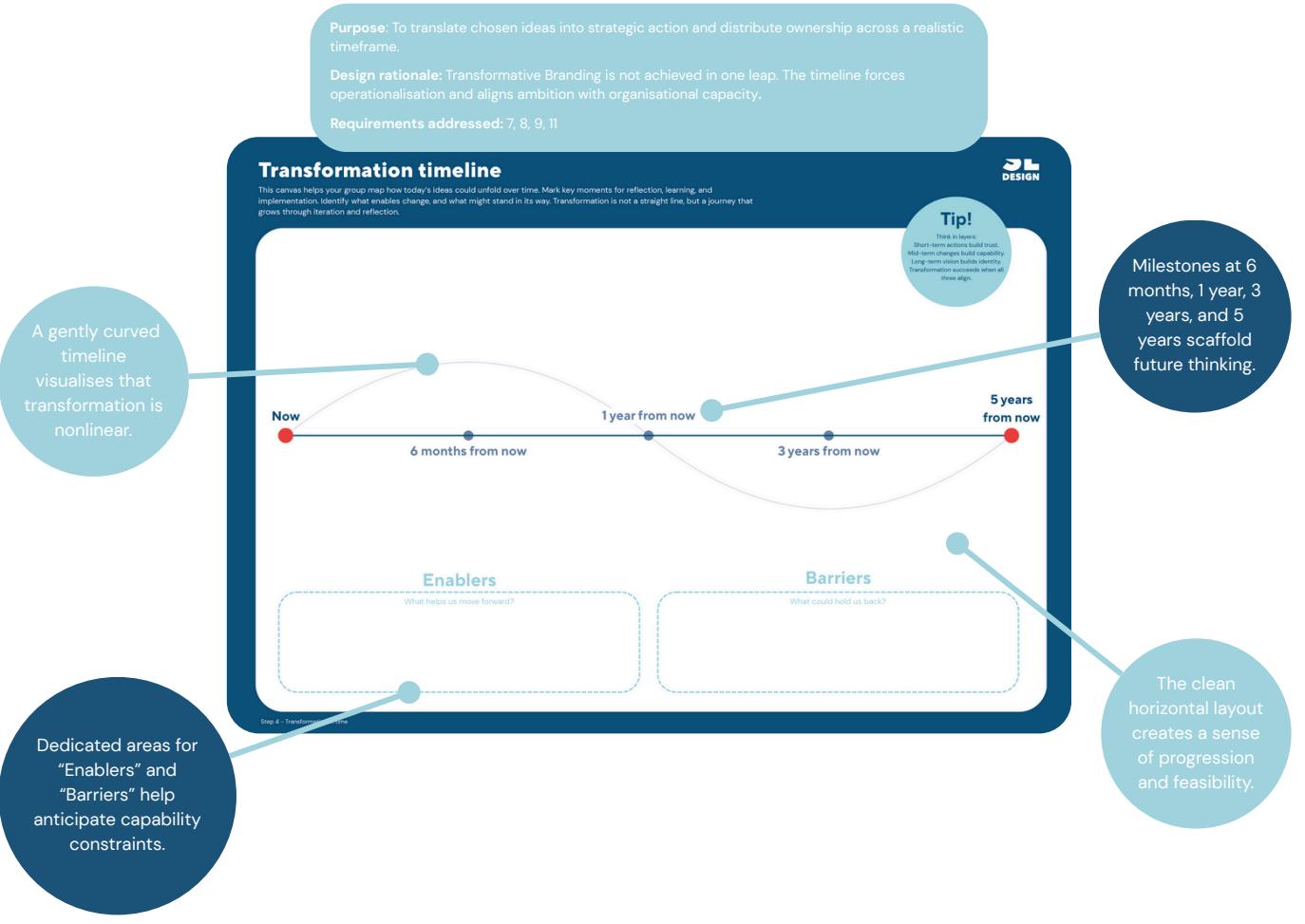
### Tension field ideation canvas: make the seizing capability visible



The tension field ideation canvas with design elements.

Figure 41

### Transformation timeline canvas: embed action orientation



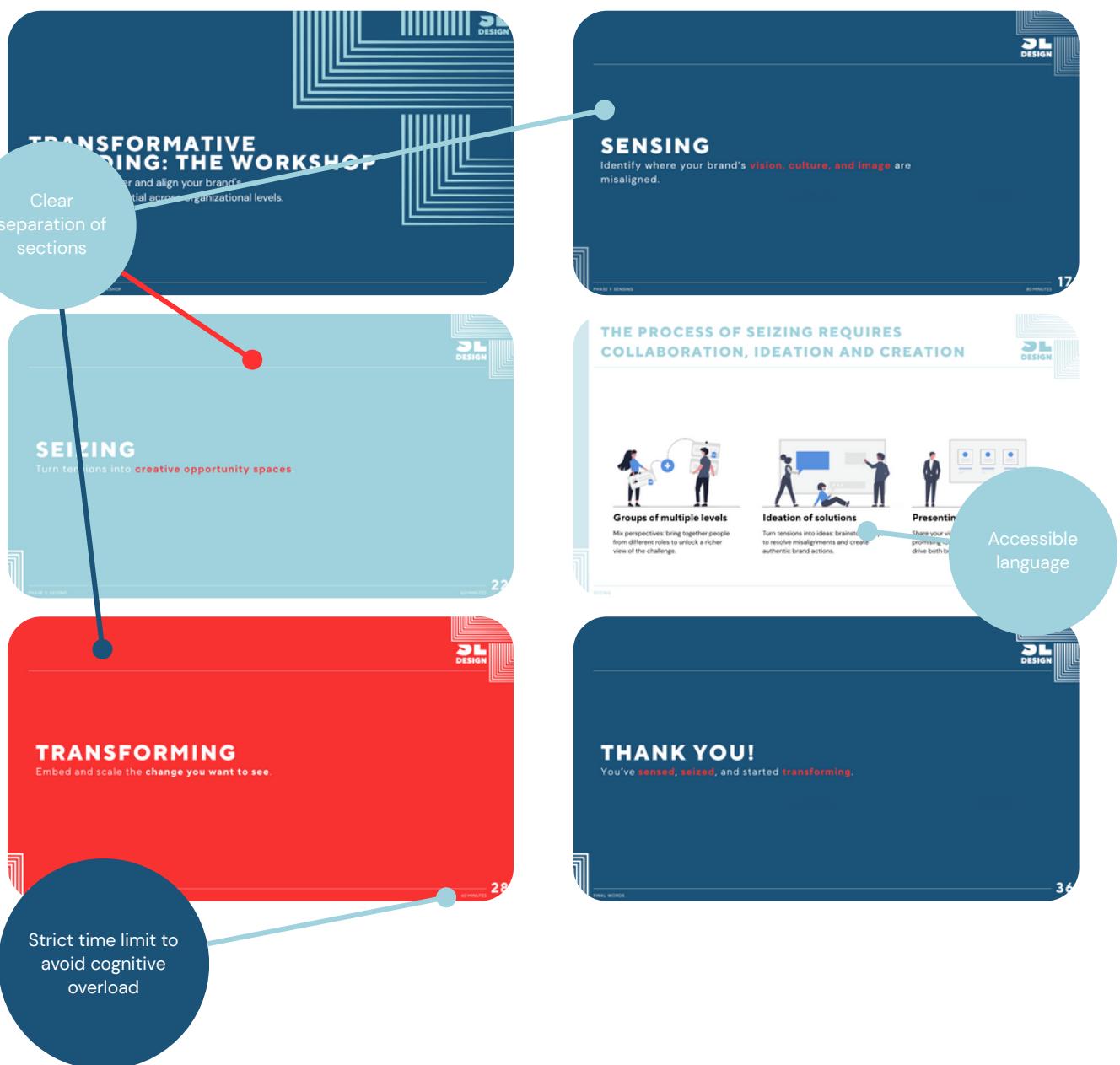
## Slideshow design

A small, visual slide deck accompanies the posters to:

- Provide minimal but necessary theoretical framing (sensing–seizing–transforming).
- Communicate the flow of activities.
- Align mental models before participants begin hands-on work.

Its purpose is not to teach branding theory exhaustively; rather, it primes participants just enough to engage meaningfully with the physical materials (Figure 42). The full slideshow can be found in Appendix 4 (Figure A6).

Figure 42



Part of the slideshow and its design elements.

### ***Prototyping, feedback, and refinement***

The posters underwent several rounds of prototyping with:

- Industrial Design Engineering peers, who evaluated visual hierarchy, clarity, and usability.
- Millennial and Gen X professionals, representing typical workshop participants.
- Pilot workshop participants at BIRD and frog, described later in the chapter.

Key improvements resulting from feedback included:

- Expanding white space for clustering and movement.
- Simplifying language to reduce cognitive load.
- Improving iconographic cues.
- Adjusting timelines for more intuitive progression.
- Repositioning tips to guide without distracting.

This iterative refinement ensured the materials aligned with both theoretical intentions and real-world usability, a necessary condition for creating a repeatable organisational capability.

The posters and slide deck are not passive artefacts; they are active components of the Transformative Branding capability. By translating theory into a material system, the workshop becomes not only a one-time intervention, but a strategic platform organisation can continue to use to navigate societal expectations, generational shifts, and evolving brand identities.

### ***Conclusion***

The full workshop designed in this section translates the Transformative Branding framework into a concrete, actionable method that organisations can apply independently. The workshop is designed as a participatory method that enables organisations to systematically explore their vision, culture, and image; surface tension fields; and collaboratively develop strategic directions for transformation.

The structure of the workshop is grounded in Dynamic Capability Theory, operationalising the sensing, seizing, and transforming activities into clear phases with defined outputs. Responsible Design Thinking principles guide the facilitation approach, ensuring that the process is reflective, inclusive, and oriented toward long-term societal value. The format has been shaped and refined using insights from two early pilot workshops, helping clarify where participants need support, how instructions are interpreted, and what conditions enable strong outcomes.

The workshop positions the designer not as an expert author of brand meaning, but as a facilitator of organisational learning, responsible for surfacing tensions, structuring dialogue, and enabling collective sensemaking.

## 4.2 Transformative Branding: testing the workshop

This chapter translates the conceptual work on Transformative Branding into practice by examining how the workshop format performs when applied in real organisational settings.

While the previous chapters articulated the theoretical foundations and design of the workshop (Appendix 3), this chapter focuses on testing the method in use to understand how clearly it communicates the Transformative Branding logic, how usable it is for practitioners, and how effectively it surfaces brand-related tensions and transformation opportunities. Given the limited time and scope of this graduation project, the workshops were not designed as full-scale validation studies, but as developmental tests aimed at refinement. To do so, the workshop was implemented in two contrasting organisational contexts, BIRD Rotterdam, a hybrid hospitality and cultural venue, and frog, part of Capgemini Invent, a design and innovation consultancy. These cases provide context-rich insights into how different organisational realities, participant profiles, and constraints shape the dynamics, outcomes, and perceived value of the Transformative Branding workshop, and together inform a set of methodological improvements and directions for future validation (results in Appendix 5). At the end of each workshop a short survey was conducted (Appendix 6) to extrapolate more insights into the further development of the workshop and give participants a safe space to share their thoughts, anonymously.

### Testing locations (sampling)

To achieve the goal of refinement, a purposeful sampling strategy was employed. Purposeful sampling prioritizes the selection of participants and contexts based on their information richness rather than representativeness (Patton, 2015). Thus, organisations were selected for their ability to provide distinctive perspectives on branding (disagreement in clear messaging and vision), transformation capabilities (present, or not), and cross-functional collaboration (do they connect with their community/network). These abilities are all factors within Transformative Branding and the V-C-I model.

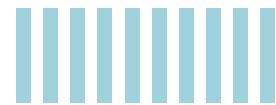
Two contrasting environments were chosen:

- BIRD Rotterdam (hospitality & cultural venue): BIRD operates simultaneously as a restaurant, café, club, and concert venue. This hybrid identity makes it a relevant context to evaluate how the Transformative Branding workshop performs in organisations marked by fluid identity, high operational tempo, and strong community involvement. Hospitality environments often rely on informal coordination, rapidly shifting priorities, and distributed responsibility, conditions that test the workshop's robustness and time efficiency.
- frog, part of Capgemini Invent (design & innovation consultancy): as a design consultancy, frog offers a contrasting context: structured processes, multidisciplinary teams, and high familiarity with workshop practices and transformation frameworks. Testing within frog enables expert-level feedback on methodological clarity, narrative coherence, and the strategic relevance of the Transformative Branding model. This environment acts as a stress test for the conceptual underpinnings and facilitation flow of the workshop. It also adds a very deep level of test to the brand transformation theory as frog is, after being acquired, part of a much larger corporation (Capgemini > Capgemini Invent > frog) and thus having more than just one brand to represent.

Testing across these two divergent settings enhances refinement in three keyways:

- Contextual robustness: Exposing the workshop to both a high-velocity hospitality environment and a structured consultancy context support the identification of design elements that are universally effective versus those that require adaptation.
- Multi-level insight: The two settings activate feedback from individuals with diverse operational, strategic, and creative roles, mirroring the distributed stakeholder logic central to Transformative Branding.
- Accelerated iterative learning: Contrasting testing environments help uncover weaknesses or frictions more efficiently, enabling precise refinements to content, instructions, facilitation dynamics, and theoretical framing.

In sum, this sampling strategy leverages diversity not for representativeness but for theoretical and methodological richness. The combination of BIRD Rotterdam and frog strengthens the workshop's refinement process, ensuring applicability across varied organisational landscapes while remaining grounded in a rigorous methodological approach.



## Test workshop preparations

This subchapter highlights the set up of the both test workshops, seen in Figure 43 below.

Figure 43

BIRD Rotterdam	frog, part of Capgemini Invent
<p>Shortened session, no possible time for preparations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Booklet send out, not filled in, not looked at by most of the participants.</li><li>• Workshop was generally shortened and theory section further compacted to make understanding easier</li></ul>	<p>Because of an even more shortened session the preparations were more extensive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Booklet send out, digitally filled in 2 days prior to workshop. Sensing phase executed by organiser.</li><li>• Workshop was generally shortened and theory section further compacted to make understanding easier.</li></ul>
<p><b>Workshop materials and set up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5 posters – AO size (placed on tables): 1 reflection canvas, 1 V-C-I canvas, 2 tension field ideation, 1 road mapping canvas</li><li>• Laptop, used for presentation and timekeeping</li><li>• Sticky notes &amp; pens</li><li>• Location: middle of the restaurant</li></ul>	<p><b>Workshop materials and set up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5 posters – AO size (placed on the walls): 1 reflection canvas, 1 V-C-I canvas, 2 tension field ideation, 1 road mapping canvas</li><li>• Screen: used to present workshop slides and present timers</li><li>• Laptop: used to control screen</li><li>• Sticky notes &amp; pens</li><li>• Location: meeting room, missing tables</li></ul>
<p>2,5-hour version</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5 min introduction</li><li>• 5 min theory</li><li>• 25 minutes of sensing<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ 10 minutes of introduction + reflection</li><li>◦ 5 minutes of transferring</li><li>◦ 10 minutes of tension field identification</li></ul></li><li>• 5-minute break</li><li>• 45 minutes of seizing<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ 5 minutes of introduction + group making</li><li>◦ 30 minutes of ideation</li><li>◦ 10 minutes (5 minutes per group) of presenting</li></ul></li><li>• 10-minute break</li><li>• 25 minutes of transforming<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ 15 minutes of timeline creation</li><li>◦ 10 minutes of identifying enablers and barriers</li></ul></li><li>• 5 minutes of wrap up</li></ul>	<p>1 hour 45 minutes version</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 10 min introduction</li><li>• 5 min theory</li><li>• 5 minutes of sensing (booklet filled in)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ 1 minute of introduction + reflection</li><li>◦ 1 minute of transferring</li><li>◦ 3 minutes of tension field identification</li></ul></li><li>• 45 minutes of seizing<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ 5 minutes of introduction + group making</li><li>◦ 30 minutes of ideation</li><li>◦ 10 minutes (5 minutes per group) of presenting</li></ul></li><li>• 5-minute break</li><li>• 25 minutes of transforming<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ 15 minutes of timeline creation</li><li>◦ 10 minutes of identifying enablers and barriers</li></ul></li><li>• 5 minutes of wrap up</li></ul>
<p>7 total – all active inside the brand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2 founders</li><li>• 2 co-owners (also have roles: general manager and event manager)</li><li>• 2 interns (marketing &amp; technical)</li><li>• 1 employee (marketing)</li></ul>	<p>7 total – all active inside the brand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2 managers</li><li>• 3 senior consultants</li><li>• 2 consultants</li></ul>
<p>Two groups of three during transformation phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Group 1: 1 founder, 1 co-owner, 1 employee</li><li>• Group 2: 1 founder, 2 interns</li></ul>	<p>Two groups during transformation phase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 manager, 2 senior consultants, 1 consultant</li><li>• 1 manager, 1 senior consultant, 1 consultant</li></ul>

The set up for both test workshops.

## Test: BIRD Rotterdam

The Transformative Branding workshop conducted at BIRD Rotterdam proved to be highly effective. Participants demonstrated strong interest and curiosity from the outset, which created an engaged atmosphere during the introduction and the initial explanation of the Transformative Branding framework. Following the introductory phase, participants immediately began working on the sensing phase. All digitalised results can be found in Appendix 5 (Figure B1, B2, B3, B4, B5).

### Sensing phase

The sensing phase resulted in a densely filled reflection canvas (Figure 44), characterised by both converging and contradictory inputs. Participants worked through the sensing prompts relatively quickly; although contributions tapered off sooner than expected, the collected input proved sufficient to proceed to the next phase.

Transitioning to the V-C-I canvas required more facilitation. I began by modelling the placement of a few example sticky notes, after which the participants collectively positioned the remaining ones. This approach accelerated the process and created a shared understanding of the categorisation. During the subsequent plenary discussion, two primary tension fields emerged (also visible in Figure 45):

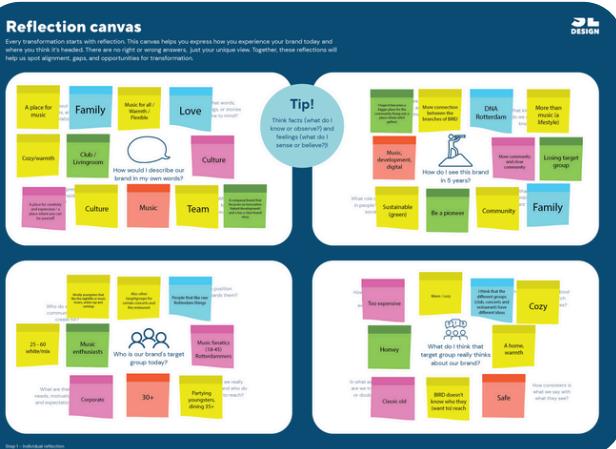
1. We want to be a community but a very spread target group/presence at events.
2. We want to be Rotterdam DNA, but we don't represent that image enough, for example by being too expensive.

However, additional tension fields surfaced during my post-workshop analysis of the V-C-I canvas:

- We want to be a lifestyle brand, but we are primarily perceived as a music venue.
  - Vision: "More than music (a lifestyle)"
  - Culture: "A place for creativity & expression / a place where you can be yourself"
  - Image: "A place for music," "Club / Living room," "Partying youngsters, dining 35+"
- We want to attract a diverse age range, but the separation between our business branches strongly polarises age groups.
  - Vision: "More than music (a lifestyle)"
  - Culture: "A place for creativity & expression / a place where you can be yourself"
  - Image: "A place for music," "Club / Living room," "Partying youngsters, dining 35+"

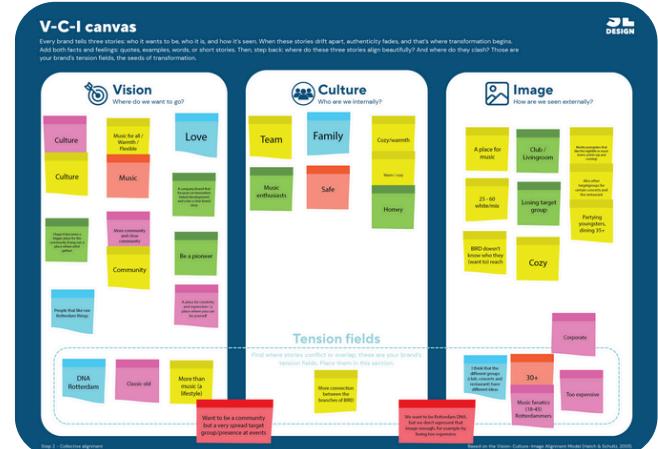
These tensions highlight a deeper organisational pattern: a structural split between the branches (restaurant, club, garden) influencing both internal alignment and external perception.

Figure 44



Filled reflection canvas BIRD workshop.

Figure 45



Completed V-C-I canvas with agreed upon tension fields.

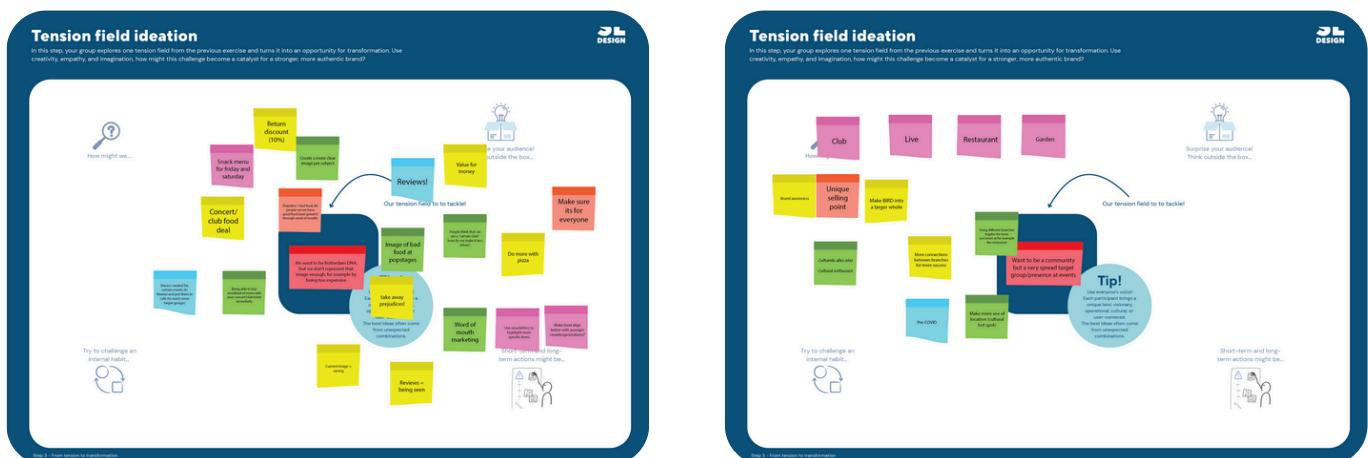
## Seizing phase

Participants were divided into two groups to begin the ideation phase. Initially, both groups struggled to determine where to start. By guiding them toward identifying the underlying problem within their chosen tension field, the ideation processes gained momentum. Interestingly, both groups converged on the same core challenge: the structural separation between BIRD's business branches leads to fragmented audiences, weakened community formation, and a diluted representation of the Rotterdam identity.

During conversations with the C-suite, this fragmentation was contextualised historically: the division between restaurant, club, and garden had been introduced before the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately six years ago, and continued to shape internal identity and brand coherence. The leadership acknowledged that operational demands ("keeping the machine running") often overshadowed strategic alignment and long-term evolution.

Despite the shared underlying challenge, the two groups' ideation outputs differed (see Figure 46): One group focused on organisational and brand-level changes, such as strategic alignment and cross-branch coherence. The other developed practical product or programming ideas aimed at strengthening short-term community engagement. When the groups presented to one another, clear thematic convergence emerged.

Figure 46

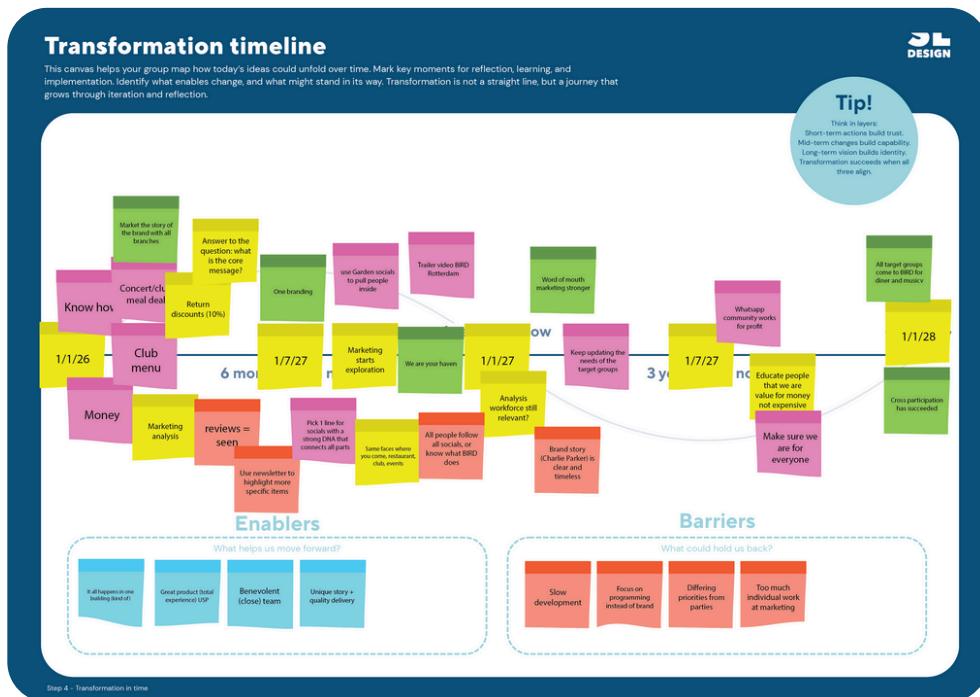


Both tension field ideation results.

## Transforming phase

This alignment made the subsequent timeline construction more efficient: participants formulated a shared two-year transformation horizon and collaboratively populated it with actions and milestones. The completed transformation timeline (Figure 47) reflected a strong sense of momentum, and the workshop closed with an energetic and motivated group.

Figure 47



Final version of the transformation timeline.

## Post-workshop reflection

In a follow-up conversation with a newly promoted co-owner just after the workshop, an additional tension surfaced: the struggle between maintaining the daily operational demands of a hospitality venue and simultaneously evolving the brand's strategic identity. The misalignment of internal vision, shaped by decisions made years earlier, was noted as a challenge not unique to BIRD but characteristic of many experience-driven brands and small-to-medium organisations.

## frog, part of Capgemini Invent

The workshop conducted at frog, part of Capgemini Invent, demonstrated a high level of preparation and analytical depth. Participants completed the pre-workshop reflection homework thoroughly (preparation booklet, figure A1 in Appendix 3), resulting in rich initial input. Several factors contributed to this maturity of insight: the individual pre-work before the session, the professional background of the participants, and their familiarity with reflective and strategic framing tools. Consultants tend to be experienced in articulating abstract reflections, translating implicit feelings into concrete insights, and navigating complex facilitations, all of which shaped the workshop dynamic. All digitalised results can be found in Appendix 5 (Figure B6, B7, B8, B9, B10).

### Sensing phase

The sensing phase was largely conducted online through the Miro platform, where participants completed their individual reflection canvases in advance (see Figure 48). This resulted in a substantial volume of inputs, including several early indicators of potential tension fields. The subsequent V-C-I canvas (Figure 49) was also prepared in advance by me, with only minor adaptations required for participants who had not completed the homework.

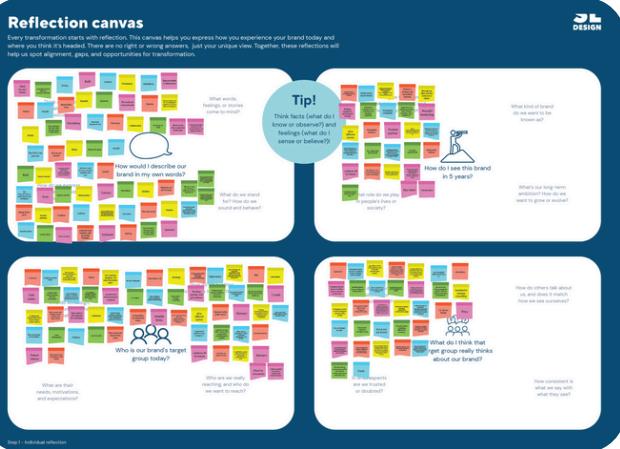
During the discussion of the most pressing tension fields, partly informed by those I had identified during my preparatory analysis, the group collectively prioritised the following two:

1. We want to make societal impact, but our current clientele and targeting do not perceive us as a strategic partner.
2. The global branding we currently operate under does not resonate with us, the umbrella organisation, or our clients.

However, deeper analysis of the V-C-I canvas after the workshop revealed additional, structurally relevant tensions:

- We want to be futurists and bold innovators, but our tone of voice is overly formal and cautious.
  - Vision: "Sustainable solutions," "Human-centred futures," "Meaningful transformation"
  - Image: "Not perceived as sustainable/regenerative focused," "We need stronger proof points"
- We strive for strategic impact, but we are still perceived primarily as designers or deliverers.
  - Vision: "Sustainable solutions," "Human-centred futures," "Meaningful transformation"
  - Image: "Not perceived as sustainable/regenerative focused," "We need stronger proof points"
- We want to provide end-to-end transformation, but in practice we often only execute isolated segments of that journey.
  - Vision: "Long-term transformation partner," "Driving meaningful, achievable, and sustainable transformation," "End-to-end"
  - Image: "We are not doing enough projects we say we do," "Mostly executing what others strategized," "Doubted on ability to scale"

Figure 48



Filled reflection canvas frog workshop.

Figure 49



Filled V-C-I canvas with agreed upon tension fields.

## *Seizing phase*

The ideation phase started with both groups immediately starting to frame How Might We (HMW) questions to articulate the underlying problems behind their selected tension fields. This approach, more focused on deepening understanding than prematurely generating solutions, reflects their expertise as experienced workshop practitioners. Figure 50 presents the shortened results of these ideation sessions, showcasing the emphasis on problem exploration rather than solution-driven brainstorming. Some brainstorming was done, the group working on Tension field 2 even sought out two tracks to change, reasoning for preferring the second and working for solutions in it.

The presentations from both groups sparked meaningful cross-group dialogue. Participants enriched each other's work by offering complementary perspectives, thereby deepening the ideation outcomes. These exchanges were so valuable that they ultimately disrupted the schedule, with the participants collectively deciding to skip the planned break. Despite the extended discussion, group energy remained high.

**Figure 50**



*Both tension field ideation results from the frog workshop.*



## Transforming phase

After the presentations, the group moved toward constructing the transformation timeline (Figure 51). Due to an unexpected room scheduling issue, this part of the workshop had to be completed in the hallway. Despite this logistical disruption, the team remained engaged and collaborative.

Given that both tension fields converged on the same underlying challenge, the group established a shared long-term goal:

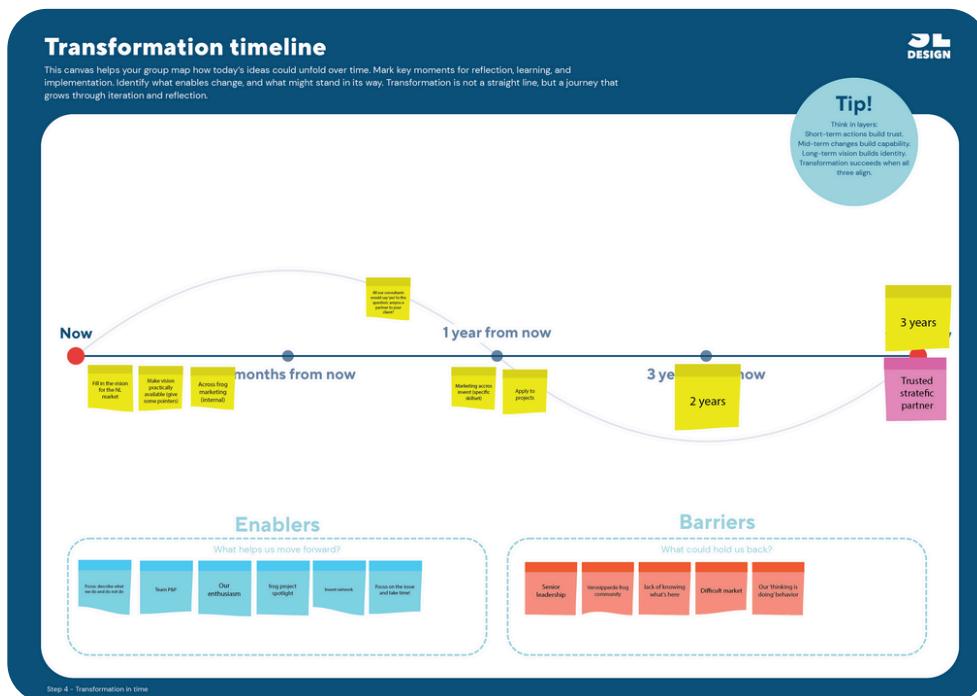
- Becoming a trusted strategic partner within three years.

While translating ideation outcomes to timeline actions, the group associated with the first tension field found it difficult to articulate concrete steps. Their ideation had intertwined with actions relevant to the second tension field, resulting in a relatively sparse timeline beyond the first year. This outcome is not problematic: early-year actions were foundational and intentionally enabled future growth, making later steps naturally harder to define at this stage.

Even though the timeline was not fully filled, participants found it easy to identify barriers and enablers. Several barriers were recognised as potential enablers once certain capabilities or initiatives were established, for example, “senior management” and “lack of knowing what’s here” could shift from obstacles to strengths after completing foundational steps.

The workshop concluded with a positive tone. Participants affirmed the value the session brought to their current organisational situation. When asked whether branding conversations occurred often, they indicated that operational demands generally take precedence (“running the business first”). As a result, strategic brand discussions are infrequent and fragmented. They expressed appreciation that the workshop provided a starting point and partial plan that could make future execution more feasible.

Figure 51



Completed transformation timeline canvas by the frog participants.

## Learning points and methodological improvements

During the workshops multiple improvements for the workshop concept were discovered, in conversation with participants and through observation during the workshop.

### ***Preparation & facilitation***

- Time management (also voiced by participants in survey): Clearly documenting target end-times for each phase is essential to support a structured workshop flow.
- Spatial and technical setup: Providing a screen for presentation slides and visible timers significantly improves participant orientation and pacing.
- Agreed upon explanation level of theory (also voiced by participants in survey): the meeting prior to the session is essential to find a level to which the company would like to dive into the theory, some brands want a deep understanding others don't.
- Phase transitions: the workshop allows for easy exit and entrance between phases allow participants to re-enter and exit activities smoothly, especially when shifting between reflection and co-creation.
- Pre-preparing the initial sensing and V-C-I phases provides deep insight into brand structures before the workshop.
  - Repeating this level of preparation for every workshop enhances facilitator understanding and supports more effective guidance during ideation and transformation phases.
- A stable, well-equipped workshop environment is essential:
  - Reliable workspace with chairs, tables, a screen, and accessible wall space.
  - Room access should be possible at least 30 minutes beforehand for setup and 30 minutes afterward for reflection, documentation, and cleanup.
- Document each step:
  - Photographs should be taken after every completed phase to preserve the process and support analysis.
- Presence of senior+ management is crucial:
  - Without decision-making authority in the room, participants perceive limited capacity for real change.
  - This affects both mindset and the feasibility of implementation.

### ***Sensing phase***

- Post-it transfer dynamics: The movement of sticky notes from the reflection canvas to the V-C-I canvas should be facilitated collectively. After demonstrating a few examples, the full group should conduct the transfer autonomously. This encourages shared ownership and reduces the sense of a controlled or instructor-led process.
- Take sufficient time to identify a broad range of tension fields.
  - This benefits both participants understanding and the long-term value of the brand analysis.
  - Do not stop once each group has "enough" tension fields for their task; selecting and prioritising later is still possible.

### **Seizing phase**

- Group composition (also voiced by participants in survey): Each group should include at most one C-suite member and at least two lower-seniority participants to prevent senior dominance. The role of C-suite participants requires careful calibration:
  - Too little involvement reduces perceived relevance and energy.
  - Too much involvement limits group creativity and suppresses diverse input.
  - This tension was also verbally acknowledged by participants.
- Presentation structure for clarity: Provide explicit guidance for group presentations to enable consistent narrative flow:
  - What was your original tension field?
  - Which underlying problem did you identify (reframing)?
  - What solutions emerged during ideation?
  - Highlight key ideas and insights.
  - Emphasise what felt authentic, achievable, and inspiring.
  - What do these solutions imply for the brand's future direction?
- Encourage participants to expand their ideation after presentations, integrating insights from the other group.
  - Allocate additional time specifically for discussion.
  - Five minutes per presentation allows for delivery, but not dialogue.

### **Transforming phase**

- Timeline process structure:
  1. Begin by collaboratively defining the overall timeframe.
  2. Each group assigns a clear end-goal derived from their tension field.
  3. The full group populates the timeline with intermediate goals.
  4. Discuss the combined timeline and all proposed actions.
  5. Identify barriers within the timeline and broader organisational context.
  6. End by identifying enablers to close the session on a positive, forward-looking note.
- Recognise that some workshops will not produce a fully linear timeline.
  - Some sessions create only the initial building blocks of change; this is a valid and meaningful outcome.
  - Encourage participants to define shorter timelines with a future goal that may sit beyond the visible time horizon.
- Identifying enablers and barriers can create immediate organisational value, even if the timeline remains partially incomplete.

## Similarities and differences between test workshops

Across both workshops, the Transformative Branding method proved effective in surfacing deep organisational tensions and enabling shared strategic reflection. Both organisations identified foundational tensions rooted in misalignment between internal aspirations (vision/culture) and external perception (image). In both cases, participants converged on a small number of core transformational challenges that shaped later phases.

However, the workshops differed substantially in process dynamics and the nature of insights. At frog, extensive pre-work and professional experience with strategic facilitation led to analytically rich inputs, swift engagement with problem framing, and a strong focus on long-term strategic positioning. The BIRD workshop, in contrast, required more facilitation and unfolded more organically, with participants revealing tensions rooted in structural fragmentation and everyday organisational realities. Where frog's tensions were tied to strategic identity and market perception, BIRD's were tied to community building, internal cohesion, and operational identity. These differences reflect distinct organisational contexts, maturity levels, and professional backgrounds, highlighting the adaptability of the Transformative Branding method across sectors.

## Survey insights from the test workshops

A short post-workshop survey ( $N = 11$ ), questions can be found in Appendix 6, was used to gather participant reflections on workshop effectiveness, emotional experience, and conceptual clarity. Although the sample is small and not statistically representative, the responses provide directional insight into how the Transformative Branding workshop was received across the two different organisational contexts. Despite its small size, the survey reinforces that the workshop: enabled high engagement, surfaced latent tensions, generated new strategic insights, and clarified brand evolution pathways for participants.

The overwhelmingly positive response—combined with targeted suggestions for facilitation and framing—provides empirical support for the workshop's value as a structured method for activating Transformative Branding as a dynamic capability.

Across all respondents, the workshop was perceived as meaningful and strategically useful.

- 82% (9/11) strongly agreed that what they contributed could create impact.
- 64% (7/11) strongly agreed that they gained new insights they did not have before.
- 64% (7/11) strongly agreed they left with a clearer sense of how their brand could evolve.

Average engagement score: 8.9/10, indicating high involvement throughout the session. Several comments illustrate this sense of meaningful contribution:

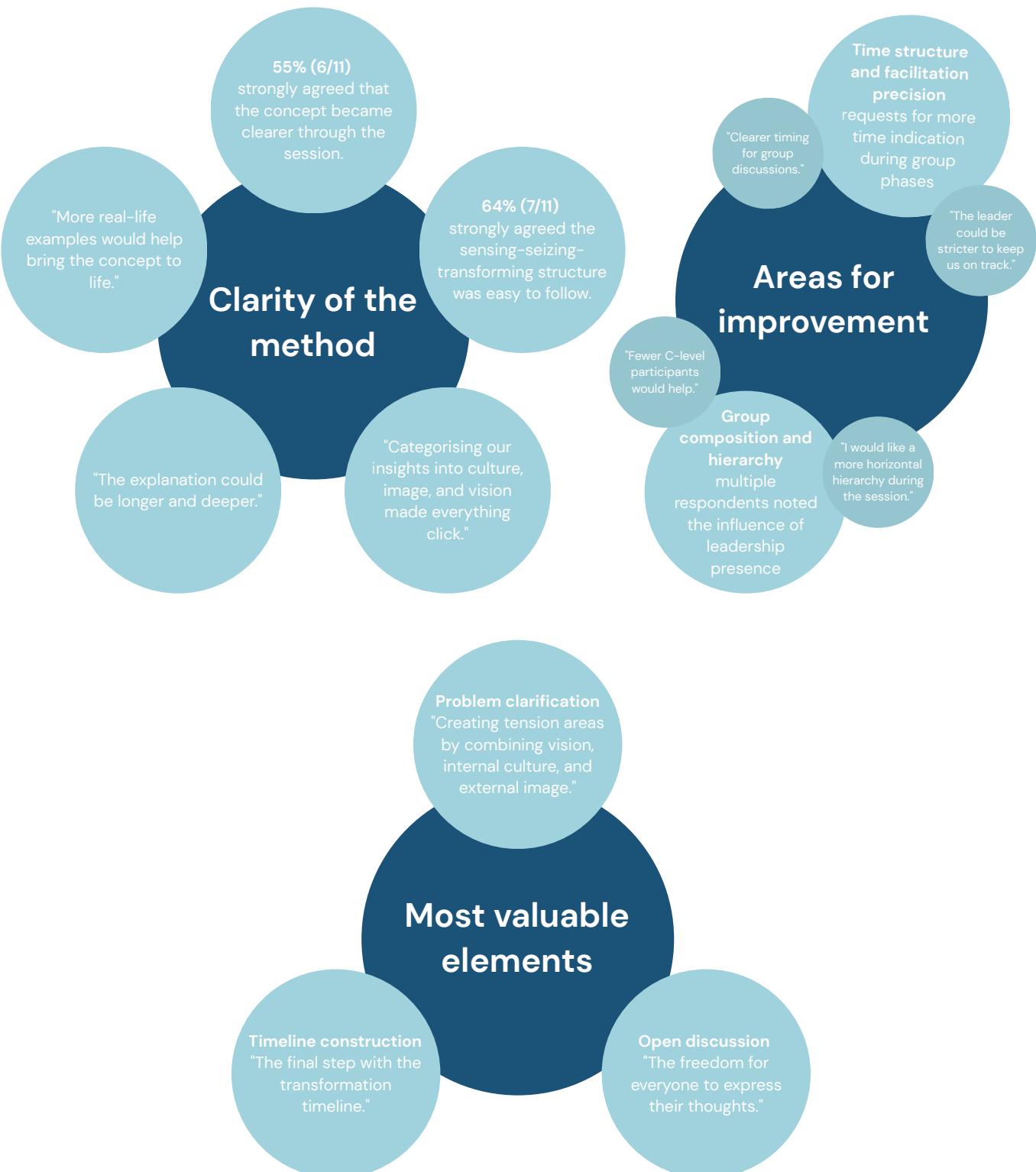
- "It was confronting to visualise the difference between what we want to be and how we are viewed."
- "Everyone knew the same problems, but we had never discussed them together."
- "It helps identify the friction we usually push aside."

These remarks reinforce that the workshop effectively activated the sensing and collective reflection components of Transformative Branding.

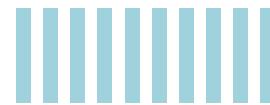
## Further information

From the input of the survey, multiple improvements where identified. It also highlighted the most valuable elements according to the participants. All these elements can be seen in the Figure 52.

Figure 52



Takeaways from the test workshops.



## Limitations of testing phase

Although the workshops at BIRD Rotterdam and frog (Capgemini Invent) provided rich insights and strong indications of the Transformative Branding method's applicability, several methodological limitations restrict the extent to which these sessions can be considered full validations of the workshop format or the theory. Instead, the workshops primarily served as refinement moments within an iterative design process. The following limitations outline where further testing and validation are required. Chapter 5 translates these acknowledged limitations into concrete recommendations for further research, design practice, and organisational implementation.

### **Limited sample size and contextual diversity**

Both workshops were conducted within a specific organisational context, each with a unique culture, structure, and level of design maturity.

- BIRD operates in the hospitality and cultural sector, characterised by resource constraints and operational immediacy.
- frog functions within a global consultancy environment, with high strategic and workshop literacy.

These two contexts offer important contrasts but remain insufficient to generalise the workshop's effectiveness across sectors or organisational types. Broader testing across industries, organisational sizes, and design maturities is required to validate the universality of the method.

### **Non-representative participant profiles**

Participant composition differed significantly between sessions.

- At BIRD, participants ranged across operational and managerial roles, but with limited strategic facilitation experience.
- At frog, participants were highly trained in ideation, facilitation, and workshop methods, enabling unusually rapid navigation of the phases. But there was no employee with organisational power present during the workshop, limiting the possible effects.

As a result, the outcomes may reflect the participants' existing capabilities more than the workshop method itself. Testing with more representative and diverse participant groups, especially with varying levels of strategic literacy, is needed to evaluate accessibility and robustness of the format.

### **Time constraints and compressed flow**

Both workshops ran within tight timeframes, which shaped participant behaviour and depth of exploration:

- At BIRD, sensing input was limited by time pressure, and ideation required facilitation support.
- At frog, extended discussions disrupted planned pacing and eliminated breaks in an already extremely shortened session (1,5 hours).

Time constraints meant that some phases, particularly transformation planning, were executed under pressure, restricting the depth and completeness of outputs. Longer sessions or multi-day formats could provide a more realistic representation of how organisations would engage with the full method.

### **Testing environment instability**

Especially in the frog workshop, the instability of the workshop environment (e.g., being moved to a hallway mid-session) likely affected concentration, creative momentum, and the completeness of the transformation timeline.

A stable physical environment is an important condition for testing the workshop fairly.

Future tests should control environmental factors to ensure that feedback reflects the workshop method, not logistical interruptions.

### ***Facilitator bias and active involvement***

In both workshops, the facilitator (researcher) played an active role in:

- Guiding participants toward deeper problem framing.
- Modelling certain steps (e.g., moving sticky notes at BIRD).
- Verbalising potential tension fields.
- Supporting ideation when groups felt stuck.

While this was necessary for refinement, it introduced a level of facilitator influence that limit objective assessment of:

- How well the workshop stands on its own,
- How intuitive the materials and instructions are,
- How much autonomy participants can maintain.

Even though this isn't a bad thing, as the facilitator should be able to help during the process of learning this method. Validation requires testing with independent facilitators, ideally multiple facilitators with varying levels of experience.

### ***Pre-prepared inputs influencing outcomes***

The frog workshop included pre-filled V-C-I canvases and extensive homework, which:

- Enriched the session.
- Partially shaped the direction of analysis before participants entered the room.

This means the resulting tension fields and ideation may be partly reflective of the researcher's input, rather than emerging naturally from participants alone. Future validation should include "clean start" sessions without pre-work visible to assess whether results converge independently.

### ***Lack of longitudinal follow-up***

Perhaps the most fundamental limitation is that:

- Neither organisation had time to implement the generated ideas,
- And no follow-up was conducted to assess whether the workshop contributed to tangible transformation, changed practices, or strategic alignment over time.

To validate the Transformative Branding workshop as an intervention, longitudinal evaluation is necessary, including:

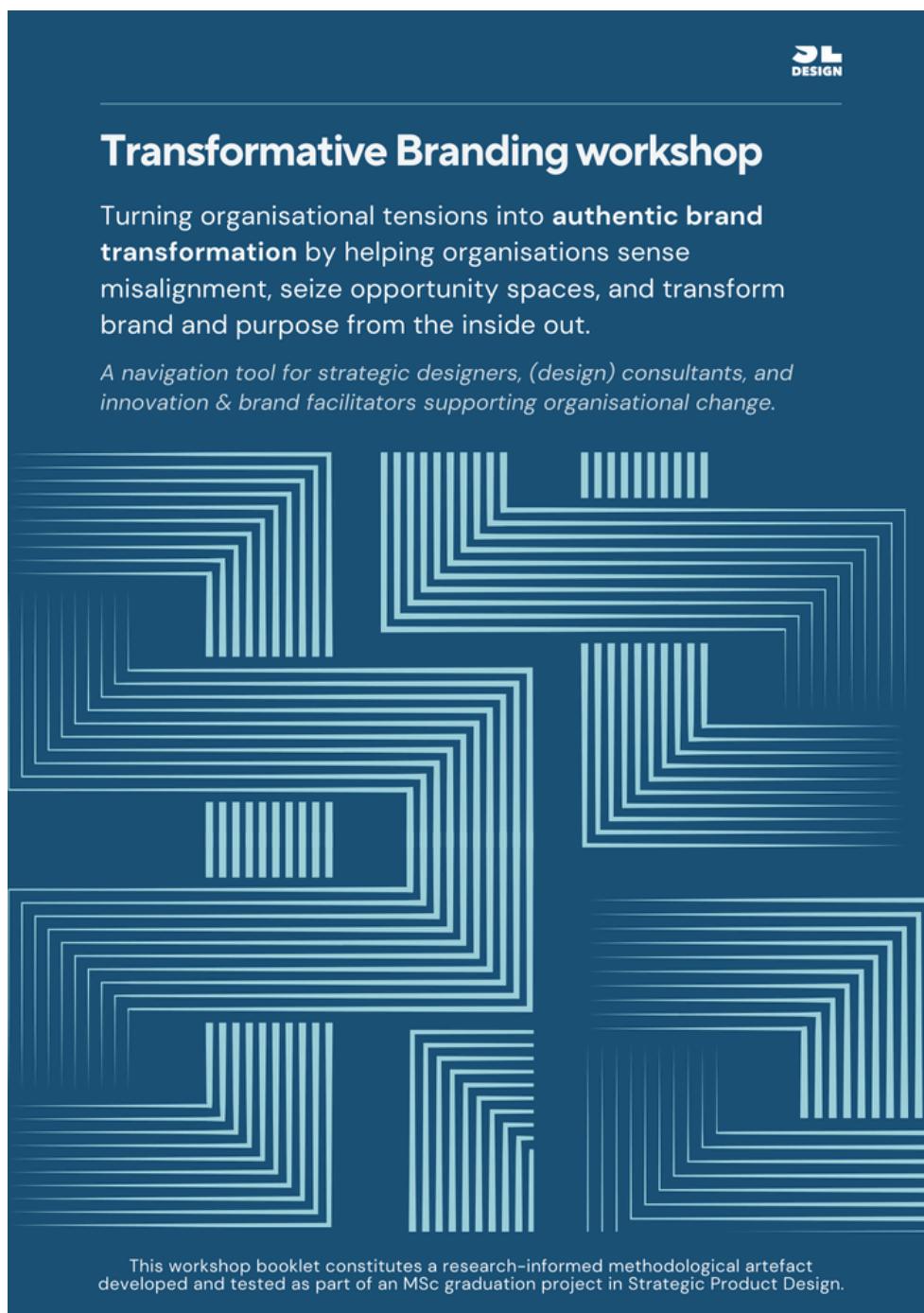
- Follow-up interviews.
- Tracking implementation progress.
- Assessing shifts in organisational behaviour or brand expression.



## 4.3 Transformative Branding: the workshop handbook

To support future facilitators and potential commissioning organisations in navigating the workshop format, a dedicated handbook was developed. This booklet provides step-by-step structure, practical facilitation guidance, and key considerations for each phase of the workshop. Figures 53, 54, 55, 56, and 57 present an overview of the individual pages of the handbook, illustrating how the workshop is introduced, guided, and supported throughout its execution.

Figure 53



The front page of the Transformative Branding workshop handbook

Figure 54

## Theoretical background

Transformative Branding frames branding **not as a communication exercise, but as an ongoing organisational capability**.

It focusses on how organisations **continuously align** what they aspire to be (vision), how they behave (culture), and how they are perceived (image), in response to changing societal, generational, and market conditions. Rather than aiming for a fixed brand position, Transformative Branding **emphasises adaptation, learning, and internal change** as the basis for authentic external value creation.

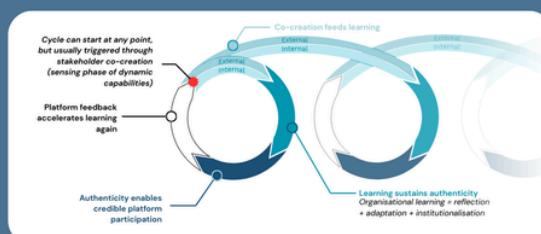
At the core of Transformative Branding lies **dynamic capability thinking**. Organisations create value not by reacting once, but by repeatedly sensing change, seizing opportunities, and transforming structures, behaviours, and practices.



The diagram illustrates a comparison between two approaches. On the left, a linear sequence of three arrows pointing right is labeled 'React' under each arrow. A vertical line labeled 'VERSUS' separates this from a circular process on the right. The circular process is labeled 'Seizing, Transforming, Sensing' and is represented by a red and blue infinity symbol.

The workshop focusses on **translating these capabilities** into tangible, facilitated activities that help teams identify misalignment, reframe tensions, and commit to meaningful change. Transformative Branding assumes that **authenticity** cannot be declared; it **must be learned over time**. The workshop is designed to activate the cycle below by turning reflection into collective learning and learning into organisational action.

Through stakeholder co-creation, organisations surface feedback, confront contradictions, and build shared understanding over time. This cycle enables credible participation, reinforces trust, and supports long-term adaptation.



The diagram shows a circular cycle of 'Co-creation feeds learning' and 'Learning sustains authenticity'. The cycle is divided into 'External' and 'Internal' phases. A red dot marks the starting point. A callout box states: 'Cycle can start at any point, but usually triggered through stakeholder co-creation (sensing phase of dynamic capabilities)'. Another callout box states: 'Platform feedback accelerates learning again'. A third callout box states: 'Authenticity enables credible platform participation'. A legend indicates: 'Co-creation feeds learning' (blue arrow), 'Learning sustains authenticity' (blue arrow), and 'Platform feedback accelerates learning again' (blue arrow).

Grounded in dynamic capability theory (Teece et al., 1997; 2007) and Vision-Culture-Image alignment (Hatch & Schultz, 2001).

## Preparations

Before the session, the facilitator should invest time in understanding the organisation.

This includes reviewing available and collecting further material such as brand strategy, internal documentation, prior research, surveys, and relevant stakeholder input. Where possible, conduct a short intake conversation with the organiser to understand context, sensitivities, and expectations.

This preparation is **not about arriving with answers**, but about being able to ask better questions. The points below highlight the conditions that matter most when creating space for honest reflection and meaningful transformation.



**Align on purpose**  
Goal: ensure the workshop has a clear reason to exist.

Before confirming the session, align with the organiser on why this workshop is being run now.

The workshop is most effective when there is a genuine question, tension, or uncertainty around the organisation's brand purpose, or direction, not when outcomes are already decided. Clarify what triggered the workshop, what level of openness is expected, and how the outcomes will be used afterwards.

Finally, define the required depth of theoretical understanding for the group: how deep does the group need to understand the reasoning, development, and workings of Transformative Branding.



**Practical set up**  
Goal: make thinking visible and shared.

The workshop relies on physical space and visibility. Ensure sufficient wall space for large posters and allow participants to move freely between them.

**Use physical materials** rather than digital tools to support collective sense-making and reduce abstraction.

**Checklist:**

- A0 posters printed and prepared
- Sticky notes & markers available
- Open wall space
- No tables blocking movement
- Session length aligned with scope



**Participants & composition**  
Goal: create cross-perspective insight, not consensus.

Invite a diverse group of participants who collectively represent the organisation's lived reality.

Aim for a mix of roles, seniority levels, and perspectives. Transformation requires multiple viewpoints to surface misalignment between vision, culture, and image.

**Guidelines:**

- Ideal group size: 8-12 participants
- Include:
  - Strategic & operational roles
  - Different seniority levels
  - Internal and, where relevant, external perspectives
- Avoid homogenous or purely managerial groups



**Facilitator mindset & cautions**  
Goal: prevent misuse and over-control.

The facilitator's role is to guide reflection, not to steer outcomes.

Create psychological safety by emphasising that there are no right or wrong answers, only different perspectives. Resist the urge to resolve tensions or fill silence too quickly; discomfort is often a sign of insight.

**Cautions:**

- Do not promise concrete solutions upfront
- Do not filter or reframe participant input
- Do not allow senior voices to summarise or "close" discussions on behalf of the group; let juniors lead
- Do not skip the sensing phase, even if the organisation feels "already aligned"; this phase is critical for transformation.

Pages 2 and 3 of the handbook cover the theoretical background and the preparations of the Transformative Branding workshop.

85

Figure 55

### Start & phase 1: sensing

### Phase 2: seizing

### Start & phase 1: sensing

### Phase 2: seizing

**Starting the session**

**Goal:** *create safety and prime reflection.*

Begin by welcoming participants and explaining the purpose of the session. Emphasise that this workshop is **not about right or wrong answers**, but about surfacing different perspectives on the organisation as it is experienced today.

Make explicit that all contributions are equally valid, regardless of role or seniority. The value of this session lies in honesty, not alignment.

With introductions, use an energizer.

- "What is one thing outsiders often misunderstand about this organisation?"
- "What is something we do internally that customers would be surprised by?"
- "What is a brand you value because of them staying authentic in transformation?"

**Phase 1: sensing**

**Goal:** *reveal misalignment and tension between vision, culture, and image.*

The sensing phase focusses on understanding how the organisation currently operates and is experienced, internally and externally.

Participants (after reflecting) map their statements, examples, and experiences related to:

- Vision: what the organisation claims or aspires to be
- Culture: how things are actually done in practice
- Image: how the organisation is perceived by customers, partners, or society

Misalignment is not treated as failure, but as valuable information.

**Step-by-step guidance**

1. Invite participants to write observations individually before discussing.
2. Place inputs on the posters openly and visibly.
3. Encourage concrete examples rather than abstract statements.
4. Allow contradictions to coexist without resolving them.

Prompts you can use when people get stuck:

- "What would you like to see different?"
- "What do you hear about it from colleagues and customers?"
- "What is something that you struggle with?"
- "What do you read about it, is it the same or different than what you experience?"

Move on when all tensions feel visible, slightly uncomfortable, and clearly articulated.

**Facilitator tips & common pitfalls**

The facilitator's stance is curious, neutral, and attentive. You are holding space, not guiding conclusions.

**Watch out for:**

- Abstract or aspirational language without examples.
- Senior participants reframing or "explaining away" tensions.
- Premature problem-solving or solution talk.

**Intervene by saying:**

- "Let's stay with what is, not what we wish it to be."
- "We'll come back to solutions later, for now let's understand the current situation."
- "Different perspectives can all be true at the same time."

**Phase 2: seizing**

**Goal:** *reframe organisational tensions into strategic opportunity spaces.*

In the seizing phase, the group shifts from understanding misalignment to exploring what becomes possible when these tensions are taken seriously.

Participants are deliberately reorganised into **small, mixed groups**. Each group should include a diversity of roles and seniority levels:

- 1 senior.
- 1-2 mid-level participants.
- 1 junior participant, who acts as group lead.

**To deliberately shift power dynamics, the junior participant leads the group sessions.** Their role is not to decide outcomes, but to guide the conversation, manage the steps, and ensure that all voices are heard.

Each group selects one tension surfaced during the sensing phase that feels most relevant, uncomfortable, or energising. The group explores this tension in depth and reframes it into an opportunity space. Guided by reframing probes (such as How might we... questions), the groups then ideate to explore directions and solution pathways that could pave the way toward meaningful transformation.

The phase concludes with group presentations. Each group presents their original tension, the reframed opportunity space, their thought process, and the emerging solution directions. After each presentation, space is created for other groups to respond, add perspectives, and share insights, allowing ideas to cross-pollinate across the session.

**Step-by-step guidance**

1. Start from the tension fields created in phase 1.
2. Group participants and assign tension fields to each group.
3. Reframe each tension field, identifying the core problems.
4. Ideate directions and solution pathways using How might we... or What if we... questions.
5. Each group presents their reframed tension field, their thought process, and solutions for transformation.

Move on when each group can clearly articulate why their opportunity space matters and what would need to change for it to exist. Or when an agreed upon timeframe has passed, in this case keep the timer visible and give cues when certain timestamps are passed.

**Facilitator tips & common pitfalls**

The facilitator's stance is generative, questioning, and slightly provocative. You are challenging assumptions, not validating conclusions.

**Watch out for:**

- Jumping to implementation details too early.
- Reducing tensions to communication problems.
- Seniors reframing or "closing" the discussion.
- Juniors deferring authority back to seniors.
- Treating ideation as solution selection.

**Intervene by saying:**

- "Whose behaviour would need to shift for this opportunity to exist?"
- "What would be the ideal situation, and what elements could be taken from that to get closer to it?"

The fourth and fifth pages of the handbook cover the start, phase 1 and phase 2 of the Transformative Branding workshop.

86

Figure 56

### Phase 3: transforming

**Goal:** translate opportunity spaces into concrete commitments and credible action.

In the transforming phase, the group moves from identifying opportunity spaces to deciding what must actually change inside the organisation. This phase is not about creating perfect plans. It is about making clear, owned commitments that begin to embed the opportunity space into everyday organisational practice.

Transformation only occurs when insights are translated into behaviour, structures, and decision-making, not when they remain conceptual.

The group first aligns on the duration of the transformation timeline (start, midpoint, and endpoint). Each group leader defines a clear goal for their tension field at both the midpoint and the endpoint of this timeline. Participants then identify and place actions on the timeline that are needed to reach these goals. Once the timeline is populated, the group reflects on the proposed actions, focussing on their realism, sequencing, and impact.

The phase concludes by identifying enablers and barriers to the transformation timeline and the actions within it. This creates space for reflection on whether the actions are achievable, what currently supports them, and what would need to change for them to succeed.

**Step-by-step guidance**

1. Agree on the timeline duration (start, midpoint, endpoint)
2. Ask each group leader to define a clear goal at the midpoint and the endpoint
3. Invite participants to place actions on the timeline that are needed to reach these goals
4. Review the full timeline together and discuss if actions are realistic, if the sequence makes sense, and if there are actions missing or overloaded
5. Identify enablers and barriers for the proposed timeline.

Move on when there is a shared transformation timeline with concrete actions, clear goals, and explicit enablers and barriers.

**Facilitator tips & common pitfalls**

The facilitator's stance is grounded, critical, and responsibility-oriented. You are helping the group commit, not overpromise.

**Watch out for:**

- Vague or symbolic actions ("communicate more", "raise awareness")
- Shifting responsibility to future projects or external teams
- Avoiding ownership by using abstract language
- Overloading the organisation with too many actions

**Intervene by saying:**

- "What would actually change tomorrow morning?"
- "Who is accountable for this, by name?"
- "When will it be a success?"

### Wrap-up, follow-up & aftercare

**Wrapping up**

**Goal:** consolidate insights into shared understanding and individual reflection, supporting ownership beyond the workshop.

The wrap-up closes the workshop by slowing the pace and creating space for reflection. This moment is not about adding new content, but about helping participants make sense of what surfaced and what it means for them individually and collectively.

Use this moment to acknowledge the discomfort, energy, and honesty that emerged throughout the session. Reinforce that transformation does not end here, it begins here.

**Reflection prompts:**

- What inspired you most today?
- What did you learn about our brand that you didn't see before?
- What is one action you could take tomorrow to continue this transformation?

Avoid discussion drifting into problem-solving. **Reflection is the goal.**

**Next steps**  
**Goal:** translate workshop outputs into organisational continuity.

Before closing the session, make the next steps explicit. This prevents the workshop from becoming an isolated moment and signals that the work will be taken seriously.

**Recommended next steps:**

1. Share the transformation timeline and key outputs internally.
2. Link workshop outcomes to existing strategy, planning, or review cycles.
3. Agree on a concrete follow-up moment (e.g. a check-in or workshop in 3-6 months).

**Clarity matters more than certainty.** Even small next steps are preferable to vague intentions.

**Aftercare**  
**Goal:** ensure the workshop leads to real capability building rather than one-off insight.

Aftercare focuses on helping the organisation retain learning and sustain reflection. Over time, this supports internal ownership.

**Recommended actions after each workshop:**

- Send a short synthesis PDF including:
  - The completed transformation timeline.
  - All identified tension fields (including those not fully explored).
  - Digitalised versions of canvases and posters.
  - A concise summary of key insights and patterns.
- Conduct 20-minute follow-up calls with group leaders
- Facilitate an alignment session with senior management to connect insights to decision-making.

**Capability building**  
**Goal:** embed Transformative Branding as an ongoing organisational capability.

For organisations aiming to build long-term resilience and authenticity, consider the following practices:

- Quarterly branding refreshes to surface new tensions
- Annual transformation roadmap renewal
- Formation of an internal Brand Transformation Team to steward learning, alignment, and follow-through

Over time, these practices help shift Transformative Branding from a workshop format into a shared organisational way of working.

Where relevant, offer a capability activation package, including:

- The tools used during the workshop
- Templates for running future sessions internally

The sixth and seventh page round of the Transformative Branding workshop.

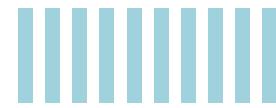


Figure 57

## Why does this workshop exist?

This workshop was created to help organisations move beyond performative branding and engage in authentic transformation, supporting more responsible organisational transformation, step by step.

**Participatory**



Large A0 posters act as collective thinking surfaces. Their scale creates shared visibility across the room and invites movement, collaboration, and physical interaction.

This setup lowers hierarchical dynamics, enables distributed cognition, and helps participants externalise tacit knowledge that would otherwise remain unspoken.

By making thinking visible and shared, teams are able to see the organisation as a system rather than a set of isolated perspectives.

**Evidence based**



Working with sticky notes on open white space allows participants to contribute without needing to speak up, creating room for junior, introverted, or less dominant voices.

Multiple interpretations can coexist, be clustered, reframed, and rearranged, allowing patterns, contradictions, and emerging tensions to surface visually.

This grounds discussion in lived organisational evidence rather than opinion or hierarchy.

**Tension-driven**



Each poster is deliberately designed to surface tension rather than consensus. Clear headings, structured prompt clusters, and sufficient negative space guide participants through complex thinking in manageable steps. Contradictions are kept visible instead of being resolved too early, shifting focus from surface-level optimisation to deeper organisational transformation.

**Responsible by design**



By keeping the materials simple, modular, and theoretically grounded, organisations can run the workshop internally without reliance on external experts.

Over time, this supports the development of Transformative Branding as an internal capability rather than a one-off intervention. The physicality of the posters reinforces memory, continuity, and long-term use.

The workshop should be used with care, humility, and a genuine commitment to follow-through. Transformative Branding is not about crafting better stories, but about confronting misalignment, making difficult choices, and embedding change into everyday organisational practice.

In a world of increasing transparency and generational scrutiny, organisations are no longer judged by what they claim, but by what they consistently do.

Transformation starts when organisations **dare to look at themselves honestly, and choose to act on what they see.**

Stijn Linthorst (S.P.M.), MSc Strategic Product Design – TU Delft  
Graduation project | Transformative Branding

*The backpage of the booklet highlights the important of the Transformative Branding workshop.*

The visual and interaction design of the handbook follows the same design guidelines as the other workshop materials to ensure coherence and recognisability across the toolkit. This includes a consistent colour palette, typography system, iconography, and layout logic, as well as the use of clear visual hierarchies and ample white space to support cognitive accessibility. By aligning the handbook's design language with the posters, canvases, and facilitation materials, the booklet reinforces a unified workshop experience and supports intuitive navigation for both facilitators and participants.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Transformative Branding can move beyond theory and become a tangible organisational capability through a carefully designed workshop format. By structuring the process into three interconnected phases, sensing, seizing, and transforming, the workshop provides a clear pathway for organisations to diagnose tension fields, translate them into opportunity spaces, and anchor them in actionable transformation roadmaps. The integration of the V-C-I alignment model (Hatch & Schultz, 2001) ensured that tensions were not treated as vague feelings but as specific misalignments between vision, culture, and image. In parallel, the Responsible Design Thinking lens safeguarded a focus on inclusivity, reflection, and societal responsibility, reminding participants that brand transformation is not only a strategic exercise but also an ethical one.

The two test workshops at BIRD Rotterdam and frog, part of Capgemini Invent, demonstrated that the method is capable of surfacing deep, organisation-specific insights in very different contexts. At BIRD, the workshop exposed structural splits between branches, tensions around community and accessibility, and the struggle of balancing day-to-day operations with long-term brand evolution. At frog, it revealed tensions between aspirational positioning and perceived impact, between futurist rhetoric and cautious tone of voice, and between the promise of end-to-end transformation and the reality of partial execution. In both cases, the workshop generated concrete transformation timelines, energised participants, and created shared language around brand tensions and future direction.

At the same time, the chapter has been explicit about the limitations of these tests. The workshops were conducted in only two organisations, with specific participant profiles, under time constraints, and with active facilitator involvement. As such, they should be understood as developmental trials aimed at refinement rather than as definitive validation. Future work will need to extend testing across more sectors and organisational sizes, involve independent facilitators, allow for longer or multi-session formats, and include longitudinal follow-up to assess whether the workshop leads to sustained behavioural or strategic change.

Despite these limitations, this chapter provides a robust foundation for understanding Transformative Branding as a practical and learnable organisational capability rather than a static conceptual framework. The complete workshop design (Appendix 3), the cross-context testing results (Appendix 5), and the articulated methodological refinements together constitute a coherent toolkit for organisations seeking to navigate complex transitions in an authentic and responsible manner. The Transformative Branding workshop handbook further strengthens this toolkit by clarifying the facilitator's role and articulating the purpose, structure, and intended outcomes of the workshop as an integrated whole.

In the subsequent chapter, these insights will be positioned within the broader discussion of the research contributions and implications, both for branding practice and for future research on dynamic, responsible brand transformation. The workshop should be understood as a designed and iteratively tested intervention intended to operationalise Transformative Branding as a teachable capability. While initial pilot sessions provide evidence of feasibility and instructional clarity, the workshop is not presented as a fully validated or generalisable method.

# Chapter 5: recommendations and implications

# Chapter 5: recommendations and implications

This final chapter outlines the broader implications of this thesis for academic research, strategic design practice, and managerial application within modern-day organisations. It also identifies the remaining steps required to advance Transformative Branding from a promising conceptual and methodological framework into a rigorously validated, widely applicable capability-building approach. While this thesis successfully demonstrates both the feasibility and value of translating Transformative Branding theory into a physical, teachable method through the developed workshop format, it also reveals several critical areas where continued research, methodological refinement, and empirical validation are necessary to ensure its robustness and transferability across diverse organisational contexts.

## 5.1 Further research and development

This thesis primarily operated within the refinement stage of methodological development rather than achieving full empirical validation. Two workshops, conducted in contrasting organisational contexts, one at a hospitality environment (BIRD) and another at a large-scale design consultancy (frog), provided meaningful insights into the workshop's operational dynamics and participant engagement patterns. However, this limited sample size cannot definitively confirm the framework's generalisability across different industries, organisational sizes, or levels of strategic maturity, nor can it establish scalability to broader implementation. To establish empirical robustness and theoretical validity, the next phase of research should prioritise:

1. **Expanded and systematic empirical testing across organisational contexts:** to move beyond exploratory refinement, the workshop must be tested across a wider range of organisational contexts, including different sectors, organisational sizes, and levels of strategic maturity. Conducting an additional number of workshops within these diverse settings, supported by structured data collection, would enable the robust identification of recurring patterns, context-specific dynamics, and potential outliers influencing workshop effectiveness.
2. **Use of independent facilitators with varied backgrounds:** to critically evaluate the workshop's usability and degree of facilitator dependence, the methodology should be delivered by practitioners who had no prior involvement in its conceptual development or initial testing. This will reveal whether the framework can be successfully transferred to other facilitators without significant loss of effectiveness or participant outcomes.
3. **Establishment of stable and controlled workshop environments:** a consistent physical setup, standardised time allocation, and controlled social environment will help isolate facilitation quality and workshop design from environmental noise and contextual factors, a limitation identified in the BIRD session.
4. **Testing extended formats or multi-day workshop structures:** initial testing revealed that time pressure limits participant cognitive depth and reflective capacity, particularly during the transformation phase where strategic synthesis and actionable planning require consideration. Longer single-session formats or modular multi-day structures may significantly enhance both individual learning outcomes and collective capability development.
5. **Systematic comparison between pre-prepared and clean-start workshop approaches:** incorporated structured pre-work and advance materials. This approach yielded markedly more reflective, contextually grounded, and higher-quality participant inputs compared to non-prepared sessions. Formal comparative studies employing matched organisational pairs will clarify the precise value and optimal design of pre-conditioning activities, enabling evidence-based recommendations for workshop preparation protocols.
6. **Longitudinal follow-up studies with quantitative and qualitative assessment:** measuring tangible organisational impact after 3–6 months through structured interviews, observational data, and performance metrics will determine whether the workshop genuinely supports lasting capability development and behavioural change beyond the immediate learning experience. This will provide crucial evidence of the framework's practical value and return on investment.

Collectively, these steps will expand the empirical foundation of Transformative Branding, test the workshop's robustness across varied conditions, and clarify the boundary conditions under which it demonstrates maximum effectiveness. This research agenda will transform the framework from a theoretically promising intervention into a validated, evidence-based organisational development tool.

## 5.2 Implications and contributions to research

The research undertaken in this thesis makes several contributions that advance the academic discussion on today's branding theory, organisational transformation, and dynamic capabilities in meaningful and distinctive ways:

- **Integration across previously fragmented theoretical literatures:** this thesis systematically connects multiple theories, including branding theory, corporate social responsibility and sustainability transitions, generational research, organisational learning, and digital culture studies, into a unified and analytical framework. This holistic and interdisciplinary perspective more accurately reflects the complex, interconnected reality in which modern-day brands operate.
- **Application of dynamic capability theory to brand-level organisational practice:** the conceptualisation of sensing, seizing, and transforming as brand-level organisational capabilities provides theoretical clarity on how brands can systematically and proactively respond to accelerating cultural, regulatory, and societal change. This extension of Teece's (1997, 2007, 2017) dynamic capability framework into the branding domain is accompanied by concrete behavioural indicators and observable practices, bridging the gap between abstract theory and empirical operationalisation.
- **Contribution to understanding capability interdependencies and system dynamics:** the theoretical framework explicitly highlights how sensing, seizing, and transforming capabilities mutually reinforce each other through recursive feedback loops and co-evolutionary processes. The workshop methodology further visualises and makes tangible these interdependencies, enabling both academic researchers and practitioners to empirically explore how capability gaps emerge, persist, and evolve within specific organisational systems.
- **Clarification of causal mechanisms underlying brand transformation:** rather than relying on correlational studies that link ESG performance or perceived authenticity to financial outcomes through statistical association, this thesis describes and explicates the internal organisational processes, such as adaptive learning cultures, participatory strategy-making practices, and stakeholder-informed collective sensemaking, that actively convert external environmental pressures into meaningful organisational change. This mechanistic understanding provides actionable insights for both researchers and managers.
- **Development of a new middle-range theory for Transformative Branding:** the theoretical model developed in this thesis occupies a productive middle ground: it is sufficiently abstract and generalisable for rigorous academic analysis and theory-building, yet simultaneously operational and concrete enough to guide practical managerial decision-making and strategic implementation. This bridging of the persistent gap between high-level abstraction and ground-level application represents a significant methodological contribution to applied organisational scholarship.

Together, these theoretical and methodological contributions strengthen the conceptual legitimacy and empirical foundation of Transformative Branding as an emerging area of academic inquiry, while simultaneously offering foundations for future academic elaboration, empirical testing, and interdisciplinary dialogue across management, marketing, and organisational studies.

## 5.3 Implications for strategic designers

For strategic designers and design consultancies, this thesis introduces a completely new methodological avenue for addressing large-scale, systemic brand challenges that transcend traditional design engagements. Transformative Branding is positioned not as a purely theoretical abstraction but as a practical, deployable capability-building toolkit that designers can effectively implement within organisations seeking ethical, authentic, and future-oriented transformation in an era of heightened stakeholder scrutiny and cultural volatility.

The practical relevance and strategic value for contemporary strategic design practice includes:

- A fundamentally new role for strategic designers as organisational capability builders: designers are repositioned from being merely facilitators of discrete innovation projects or singular creative outputs to becoming strategic partners who help organisations systematically implement internal sensing, seizing, and transforming capabilities. This role elevation positions designers as long-term organisational development partners rather than transactional service providers, fundamentally changing the nature and duration of client relationships.
- A scalable, design-driven, and evidence-based capability-building methodology for branding challenges: the workshop provides strategic designers with a transferable and structured approach to support brand teams and cross-functional stakeholders in diagnosing strategic misalignment, surfacing organisational tensions, and co-creating transformation strategies grounded in lived organisational experience and authentic cultural values. By integrating design-led facilitation with a theoretically grounded framework, the method equips organisations to navigate branding complexity and uncertainty in a way that moves beyond superficial or top-down branding interventions.
- An explicitly ethical orientation to organisational transformation: this framework actively supports organisations in meaningfully navigating complex sustainability imperatives, authenticity demands, and evolving generational expectations without resorting to problematic strategies such as absorbing and homogenising smaller design firms through acquisition-based growth approaches that undermine cultural distinctiveness and dilute the designfirms core beliefs.

By providing strategic designers with both a rigorous theoretical lens and an immediately actionable methodological toolkit, this thesis makes a substantive contribution to the evolving professional role of strategic design in actively shaping organisational futures, moving the discipline beyond aesthetics and user experience toward systemic organisational transformation and capability building.

## 5.4 Implications for practitioners

Transformative Branding represents a shift in how organisations should conceptualise, develop, and strategically manage their brand in an era of stakeholder capitalism and cultural acceleration. Instead of treating branding primarily as a communication function, creative output, or marketing campaign, it positions the brand as a core organisational capability that requires ongoing governance, deep cultural alignment, sustained investment, and genuine long-term development commitment from senior leadership.

### Strategic priorities for embedding Transformative Branding

Practitioners and organisational leaders genuinely committed to embedding Transformative Branding as a lasting capability within their organisations should prioritise the following strategic imperatives:

- Elevate the brand function from a tactical execution role to a strategic governance concern with board-level visibility, embedding it alongside corporate strategy, risk management, and organisational development as a core leadership responsibility rather than delegating it exclusively to marketing departments.
- Replace short-term, campaign-oriented thinking and quarterly performance pressures with sustained, patient long-term capability building that systematically strengthens organisational sensing, seizing, and transforming capacities through deliberate practice, continuous learning, and iterative refinement over multiple years.
- Fundamentally reconfigure stakeholder engagement as a genuinely co-creative process that is integral to sustainable value creation, moving decisively beyond symbolic gestures, performative corporate communications, or superficial PR-driven consultation exercises that generate cynicism and erode trust.
- Allocate patient capital and protected resources that explicitly support multi-year organisational development trajectories rather than succumbing to short-term pressures for immediate financial returns, recognising that authentic capability development requires sustained investment before yielding measurable performance improvements.
- Strengthen substantive cross-functional integration and collaboration between marketing, operations, human resources, supply chain management, finance, and executive leadership to systematically bridge authenticity gaps between external brand promises and internal organisational realities, ensuring coherence between brand narrative and operational practice.

To track these priorities a change in measurement systems and organisational culture needs to be made:

- Fundamentally redefine brand success metrics to explicitly include organisational adaptability, stakeholder trust, sustained cultural relevance, relational equity with diverse constituencies, and measurable systemic impact on social and environmental outcomes, moving beyond narrow financial indicators and short-term market share metrics.
- Deliberately develop and institutionalise learning-oriented organisational cultures firmly grounded in psychological safety, intellectual humility, transparent communication, and iterative experimentation, the essential environmental conditions under which sensing and seizing capabilities can genuinely flourish rather than being suppressed by fear of failure or political defensiveness.
- Actively encourage and structurally enable governance systems and communication architectures in which strategic insights, market intelligence, and stakeholder feedback travel horizontally across functional teams and organisational levels rather than being systematically filtered, distorted, or blocked by rigid hierarchical structures and bureaucratic gatekeeping.

By deliberately adopting and institutionalising these principles, practitioners can fundamentally shift their organisation's perspective from viewing the brand as a static intangible asset requiring periodic updating to understanding it as a living, evolving organisational capability. Such a capability is inherently adaptive to environmental change, authentically collaborative across internal and external boundaries, deeply grounded in ethical principles and stakeholder values, and continually informed by and responsive to the complex, dynamic world in which it operates.

## Conclusion

Transformative Branding offers a promising and timely new perspective for organisations navigating the profound cultural, societal, and generational shifts that characterise modern-day business environments. By successfully materialising abstract theory into a concrete, physical workshop format, this thesis provides both academic researchers and organisational practitioners with a tangible, immediately applicable method for systematic capability development. The comprehensive recommendations presented throughout this chapter outline a clear and actionable agenda for rigorous future validation, broader empirical testing, and wider practical adoption across diverse organisational contexts. This work marks an important methodological and theoretical step toward creating brands that transform not through superficial messaging campaigns or cosmetic rebranding exercises, but through sustained, meaningful, and ethically grounded organisational action that creates genuine value for all stakeholders and thus society.

# Reflection

This graduation project spanned approximately 105 full working days (excluding the holidays and time off), a timeframe that, in hindsight, says as much about the process as it does about the outcome. Rather than following a linear or frictionless trajectory, this graduation project unfolded through a series of delays and recalibrations: a late mid-term, a delayed green light, and ultimately a later graduation moment than initially planned. While these milestones could be interpreted as setbacks, they more accurately reflect the reality of a complex, reflective design process intertwined with my personal development.

One of the initial challenges lay in starting the project with full momentum. Coming directly out of an intensive internship, I underestimated the recovery time required to reset into a self-driven, research-heavy start of a graduation project. What I initially framed as procrastination was, in part, a genuine need for distance, reflection, and rest. Recognising this has been an important learning moment: sustainable performance, especially in strategic and conceptual work, cannot be forced without consequence. Equally challenging was the final phase of the project. I am highly comfortable in exploratory thinking, framing complex systems, and generating conceptual depth. However, this project once again surfaced a personal trait I am actively working on: the discipline required to bring ideas to completion with precision, clarity, and polish. Finishing work "to the dot of the i" does not interest me as I lose motivation after creating the outlines, yet this graduation demanded exactly that. The later stages therefore became not just about finishing a thesis or workshop, but about training myself in decisiveness, closure, and responsibility toward the work I put into the world.

The result, however, justifies this journey. The outcome is a highly usable, academically grounded method that translates theory into practice in a way that feels authentic to both my education at TU Delft and my development as a strategic designer. Rather than adding yet another product, artifact, or branded solution to an already saturated world, this project resulted in something I increasingly believe is more valuable: a method that improves how organisations think, align, and act when facing complex, systemic, and ethically charged challenges (wicked problems).

For me, this project marks a fitting end of my time at TU Delft. It encapsulates the shift from designing things for the world (years 1-2,5 of the Bachelors) to designing ways of working within it more responsibly (BEP + MSc SPD). It reflects my growth into a strategic designer who is less interested in output for output's sake, and more invested in enabling better decisions, more honesty in their branding and work, and more meaningful transformation across industries.

Looking forward, I see this work not as an endpoint but as a foundation. The knowledge, frameworks, and mindset developed through this project will directly inform how I operate in future workplaces, influencing not only my own work, but also that of colleagues, clients, and, ideally, competitors. If design has any real power in addressing the wicked problems we face, it lies in shaping how organisations sense, seize, and transform. This project has clarified that this is where I want to make my impact, helping the world become a better place, one step at a time.



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DESIGN

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# Artificial Intelligence usage

# Artificial Intelligence usage

Throughout this thesis, I collaborated with Artificial Intelligence (Anthropic's Claude AI and OpenAI's ChatGPT) as a thinking partner and augmentation tool. Rather than using AI to generate content autonomously, the system functioned as an iterative co-designer that supported my analytical, organisational, and creative processes.

They assisted in structuring arguments, improving the clarity and flow of academic writing, and synthesising large bodies of literature into coherent theoretical narratives. It also played a role in transforming raw workshop and interview data into analysable insights, helping to rephrase, cluster, or condense findings without altering their meaning.

In the development of the Transformative Branding toolkit, AI contributed to ideating and refining workshop materials, naming conventions, scripts, and visual framings, always based on inputs I provided – such as draft text, survey results, workshop boards, and theoretical models.

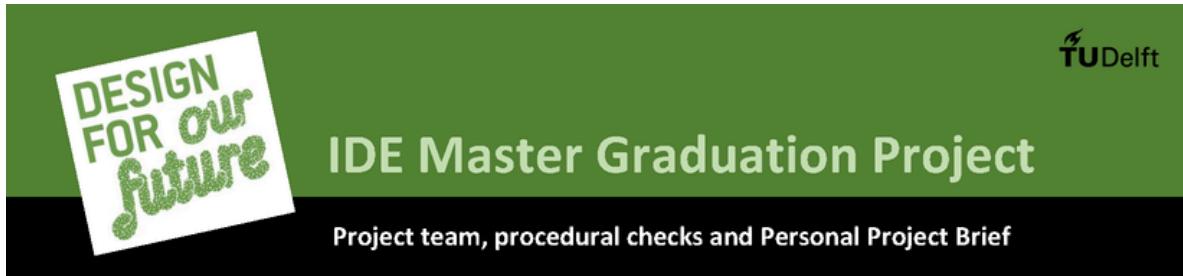
This collaboration was dialogical: each output was reviewed, adapted, and finalised by me, with AI serving as a catalyst to accelerate iteration, enhance precision, and support reflective reasoning. Ultimately, the use of AI strengthened the coherence, depth, and communicative quality of this thesis, while all substantive interpretations, methodological choices, and conclusions remain my own.

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# Appendix

# Appendix

## Appendix 1: graduation project brief



In this document the agreements made between student and supervisory team about the student's IDE Master Graduation Project are set out. This document may also include involvement of an external client, however does not cover any legal matters student and client (might) agree upon. Next to that, this document facilitates the required procedural checks:

- Student defines the team, what the student is going to do/deliver and how that will come about
- Chair of the supervisory team signs, to formally approve the project's setup / Project brief
- SSC E&SA (Shared Service Centre, Education & Student Affairs) report on the student's registration and study progress
- IDE's Board of Examiners confirms the proposed supervisory team on their eligibility, and whether the student is allowed to start the Graduation Project

### STUDENT DATA & MASTER PROGRAMME

Complete all fields and indicate which master(s) you are in

Family name **Linthorst**  
Initials **SPM**  
Given name **Stijn**  
Student number

IDE master(s) IPD  DfI  SPD

2<sup>nd</sup> non-IDE master

Individual programme  
(date of approval)

Medisign

HPM

### SUPERVISORY TEAM

Fill in the required information of supervisory team members. If applicable, company mentor is added as 2<sup>nd</sup> mentor

Chair	Sijia Bakker-Wu	dept./section	DOS
mentor	Erik-Jan Hultink	dept./section	DOS
2 <sup>nd</sup> mentor			
client:			
city:		country:	
optional comments	Sijia and Brian both come from the DOS department, yet they contribute expertise from two distinct domains. Sijia provides valuable insights into branding and research methodologies, while Brian brings a strong background in consulting and practical application. Although both are well-versed in Responsible Marketing and Consumer Behaviour, they approach the project from different perspectives; one more academic and research-driven, the other rooted in real-world consultancy experience.		

! Ensure a heterogeneous team. In case you wish to include team members from the same section, explain why.

! Chair should request the IDE Board of Examiners for approval when a non-IDE mentor is proposed. Include CV and motivation letter.

! 2<sup>nd</sup> mentor only applies when a client is involved.

### APPROVAL OF CHAIR on PROJECT PROPOSAL / PROJECT BRIEF -> to be filled in by the Chair of the supervisory team

Sign for approval (Chair)

Name **S. wu**

Date **24-09-2025**

Signature

**Sijia Wu**  
Digitally signed by  
Sijia Wu  
Date: 2025.09.24  
10:40:10 +02'00'



#### CHECK ON STUDY PROGRESS

To be filled in by **SSC E&SA** (Shared Service Centre, Education & Student Affairs), after approval of the project brief by the chair.  
The study progress will be checked for a 2<sup>nd</sup> time just before the green light meeting.

Master electives no. of EC accumulated in total

EC

Of which, taking conditional requirements into account, can be part of the exam programme

EC

★	YES	all 1 <sup>st</sup> year master courses passed
	NO	missing 1 <sup>st</sup> year courses

Comments:

Sign for approval (SSC E&SA)

  
Digitally signed by  
G. Janse  
Date: 2025.09.29  
10:44:28 +02'00'

Name G. Janse

Date 29-9-2025

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

#### APPROVAL OF BOARD OF EXAMINERS IDE on SUPERVISORY TEAM -> to be checked and filled in by IDE's Board of Examiners

Does the composition of the Supervisory Team comply with regulations?

Comments:

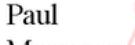
YES	★	Supervisory Team approved
NO		Supervisory Team not approved

Based on study progress, students is ...

Comments:

★	ALLOWED to start the graduation project
	NOT allowed to start the graduation project

Sign for approval (BoEx)

  
Digitally signed by  
Paul Mommers  
Date: 2025.09.29  
15:54:59 +02'00'

Name Paul Mommers

Date 29-09-2025

Signature \_\_\_\_\_



## Personal Project Brief – IDE Master Graduation Project

Name student **Stijn Linthorst**

Student number

### PROJECT TITLE, INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM DEFINITION and ASSIGNMENT

Complete all fields, keep information clear, specific and concise

**Project title** Designing brand transformation: strategic tools for navigating generational shifts and sustainability transitions.

*Please state the title of your graduation project (above). Keep the title compact and simple. Do not use abbreviations. The remainder of this document allows you to define and clarify your graduation project.*

#### Introduction

*Describe the context of your project here; What is the domain in which your project takes place? Who are the main stakeholders and what interests are at stake? Describe the opportunities (and limitations) in this domain to better serve the stakeholder interests. (max 250 words)*

In today's climate of generational change and environmental urgency, brands face increasing pressure to transform both their image and internal strategy toward authentic sustainability. As Gen Z and Gen Alpha rise in purchasing power, they demand transparent, values-driven brands that demonstrate genuine impact (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). 73% of Gen Z are willing to pay more for sustainable products, and 62% prefer sustainable brands (Nielsen IQ, 2024; First Insight, 2024). These expectations push companies, especially legacy brands, to evolve their positioning, narratives, and practices to remain relevant and credible.

This transition is complex. Organizations must navigate conflicting stakeholder values, avoid performative greenwashing, and redesign their brand identity without compromising business viability. While emerging brands are often born sustainable, most established brands struggle to transform in a credible, strategic, and future-proof way. Despite growing demand in the consultancy sector, there is a lack of structured, actionable tools that guide brands through this unique transformation.

This graduation project explores how brands can authentically shift toward sustainable positioning while addressing the tensions posed by generational values and market pressures. Through a combination of literature, interviews, and case-based insights, the result will be a validated toolkit that enables strategic guidance to transition effectively.

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**TU Delft**

## Personal Project Brief – IDE Master Graduation Project

### Problem Definition

*What problem do you want to solve in the context described in the introduction, and within the available time frame of 100 working days? (= Master Graduation Project of 30 EC). What opportunities do you see to create added value for the described stakeholders? Substantiate your choice. (max 200 words)*

#### Primary problem:

There is currently no comprehensive, market-ready toolkit that helps brands navigate the transformation toward sustainable and authentic brand identities in light of generational shifts and rising stakeholder scrutiny.

#### Core challenges:

1. Generational value conflict: Brands must appeal to emerging generations without alienating existing audiences. Expectations around transparency, purpose, and ethical behavior differ significantly across Gen Z, Gen Alpha, and older cohorts.
2. Authenticity vs. strategy: Many organizations struggle to align genuine sustainability with commercial goals, risking greenwashing or missed opportunities.
3. Toolkit gap: While sustainability is becoming a core theme, existing transformation tools often lack targeted guidance for brand-specific, generation-sensitive transitions.
4. Market positioning risks: Brands face skepticism, regulatory scrutiny (e.g., green claims), and complex decision-making between incremental and radical transformation strategies.

### Assignment

*This is the most important part of the project brief because it will give a clear direction of what you are heading for. Formulate an assignment to yourself regarding what you expect to deliver as result at the end of your project. (1 sentence) As you graduate as an industrial design engineer, your assignment will start with a verb (Design/Investigate/Validate/Create), and you may use the green text format:*

Design and validate a strategic transformation toolkit that enables brands to authentically navigate the transition toward sustainable and transparent brand identities, addressing generational tensions and market positioning challenges.

*Then explain your project approach to carrying out your graduation project and what research and design methods you plan to use to generate your design solution (max 150 words)*

The project will follow a mixed-methods structure grounded in strategic design thinking and consultancy-oriented validation:

- Phase 1: Research foundation & Context mapping (Days 1–30)
  - Literature review: Brand transformation, generational values, green branding, strategic tools
  - Analysis of existing frameworks and consultancy approaches
  - Persona development of emerging generations (Gen Z, Gen Alpha)

- Phase 2: Case analysis & interviews (Days 31–55)
  - Interviews with branding/consulting professionals
  - Case study research brands (Patagonia, Too Good to Go, Upfront, etc.)
  - Identify common tensions and transformation strategies

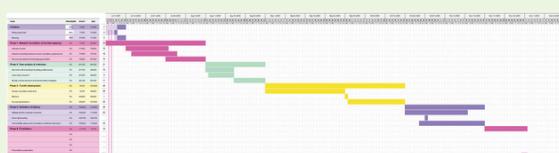
- Phase 3: Toolkit development (Days 56–75)
  - Design consultant-ready tools (e.g., templates, diagnostics, roadmaps)
  - Incorporate feedback loops with stakeholders

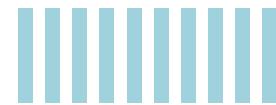
- Phase 4: Validation & testing (Days 76–95)
  - Apply toolkit in hypothetical or real brand redesign scenarios
  - Test usability, impact, and consultancy readiness

- Phase 5: Finalization (Days 96–100)
  - Document full toolkit and strategic implementation guide
  - Prepare thesis, visual materials, and public presentation

#### Design Methods

- Service design thinking, Stakeholder mapping, Journey mapping, Systems thinking, Co-creation tools, Persona development





### Project planning and key moments

To make visible how you plan to spend your time, you must make a planning for the full project. You are advised to use a Gantt chart format to show the different phases of your project, deliverables you have in mind, meetings and in-between deadlines. Keep in mind that all activities should fit within the given run time of 100 working days. Your planning should include a **kick-off meeting, mid-term evaluation meeting, green light meeting and graduation ceremony**. Please indicate periods of part-time activities and/or periods of not spending time on your graduation project, if any (for instance because of holidays or parallel course activities).

Make sure to attach the full plan to this project brief.  
The four key moment dates must be filled in below

**Kick off meeting** 7th of July

**Mid-term evaluation** 29th of September

**Green light meeting** 27th of October

**Graduation ceremony** 8/15th of December

*In exceptional cases (part of) the Graduation Project may need to be scheduled part-time. Indicate here if such applies to your project*

Part of project scheduled part-time

For how many project weeks

Number of project days per week

Comments:

### Motivation and personal ambitions

Explain why you wish to start this project, what competencies you want to prove or develop (e.g. competencies acquired in your MSc programme, electives, extra-curricular activities or other).

Optionally, describe whether you have some personal learning ambitions which you explicitly want to address in this project, on top of the learning objectives of the Graduation Project itself. You might think of e.g. acquiring in depth knowledge on a specific subject, broadening your competencies or experimenting with a specific tool or methodology. Personal learning ambitions are limited to a maximum number of five.  
(200 words max)

This project aligns with my consultancy career aspirations while addressing the critical market need for specialized sustainability branding expertise. I have just finished a consultant internship and this project can help develop these skills further. The focus on tool development and market research directly supports my goal of creating commercially viable design solutions that consultants can successfully implement with clients and change companies for the better.

Personal learning ambitions:

1. Market research: Develop sophisticated competitive analysis and market gap identification skills essential for consultancy practice
2. Tool design: Master the creation of client-ready tools that deliver measurable value and support successful consultancy engagements
3. Commercial viability: Learn to balance design innovation with market demands and sales potential
4. Sustainability expertise: Build specialized knowledge in sustainability branding that differentiates consultancy offerings
5. Client value optimization: Develop expertise in designing solutions that consultants can confidently sell and successfully implement

## Appendix 2: case study research

### Survey design

#### Start

Q0 - *intro*

'Hi!

Thank you for taking my survey. My name is Stijn and I'm conducting research for my Strategic Product Design master's graduation project on how brands transform their image to stay authentic and sustainable across generations. Your input will help me uncover more real-world examples of brands people genuinely love, or love to hate, and understand the feelings and values behind those opinions.

The survey takes about 3 minutes and completely anonymous. Your honest thoughts will directly inform my case studies on brand transformation and generational trends. Thanks for your input in advance!

#### Q1 - *Demographics*

What is your age?

#### Q2 - *Demographics*

Which generation do you most identify with?

- Gen Alpha (2010 – now)
- Gen Z (1997 – 2009)
- Millennial (1981 – 1996)
- Gen X (1965 – 1980)
- Boomer (1946 – 1964)
- Silent/Greatest (before 1946)
- Prefer not to say

#### REPEAT BLOCK – these questions could be filled up to 10 times.

#### Q3 - *Intro*

Think of brands you feel strongly about, love or dislike. It can also apply to a brand who just changed and also changed your feeling towards it because of it. You can share up to 10 examples. After each brand you can decide whether to add another. It would be great if you can do at least two, a loved and disliked brand.

#### Q4 - *Brand*

Brand name

#### Q5 - *Brand feeling*

Please select your feeling towards this brand

- Love it
- Like it
- Neutral
- Dislike it
- Hate it

### *Q6 – Reasoning*

*What is the main reason for that feeling?*

- Product quality/performance
- Price/value
- Sustainability or ethics
- Customer service
- Advertising/brand image
- Innovation/creativity
- Personal memories or nostalgia
- Other:

### *Q7 – Explanation*

Would you like to add a few words about why this reason matters to you?

### *Q8 – Buying*

The effect on my buying behaviour is:

- I buy more because of it
- I avoid buying because of it
- No change
- N.A.

### *Q9 – Continue*

Would you like to do another brand?

- Yes
- No

### **END OF REPEAT LOOP**

### *Q10 – End of survey*

Thanks so much for your time! Your answers will help me uncover real examples of how different generations connect (or clash) with brands. If you'd like to contact me about the survey you can at this address: [slinhorst@tudelft.nl](mailto:slinhorst@tudelft.nl)

**End**

## **Survey results**

The generational survey collected 86 unique brands mentioned as either loved, liked, disliked, or hated by respondents, revealing clear patterns in how younger generations evaluate brands.

Across Gen Z, Millennials, and Gen X, the strongest positive driver was product quality and performance, while the strongest negative driver was sustainability and ethical concerns, particularly toward fast-fashion brands (e.g., SHEIN, H&M, Zara), energy companies (Shell), and certain global consumer brands (Coca-Cola, Tesla). Respondents also frequently referenced brand image and advertising, which functioned as both a source of admiration (Nike, Coolblue, Porsche) and criticism (Red Bull, Always). Several comments demonstrated ambivalence, valuing a brand's identity while rejecting its behaviour, reflecting the value-behaviour tension central to Transformative Branding.

Sustainability-minded respondents often indicated that ethical concerns influenced their purchasing decisions ("I avoid buying because of it"), while others admitted a discrepancy between belief and behaviour ("Horrible, but I still buy it"). Gen Z respondents were the most explicit in linking brand perceptions to ethics, transparency, and cultural relevance, while Millennials emphasised brand experience and Gen X focused more on performance and reliability. Together, these results provided a list of culturally salient brands, highlighted generational expectations, and contributed directly to the case selection and coding process used in the broader analysis.

## Complete list of brands

The complete list of brands analysed after the survey and further own selected came to the 59 earlier mentioned, to avoid a significant workload some similar brands had just one selected for analysis such as H&M/C&A (picked H&M):

Tesla	Triodos Bank	Duvel
Jaguar	Impossible Foods	Harley-Davidson
Ford	The Nude Project	RadioShack / "The Shack"
HBO Max/Max	Ben & Jerry's	Rituals
Cardiff City FC	Burger King	Apple
Upfront	Tropicana	Zoom
LEGO	Unilever	Netflix
Patagonia	Old Spice	Revolut
Shein	The Body Shop	Heineken
TEMU	Canva	BYD
H&M	UNIQLO	Pepsi
Klarna	GAP	Gucci
Mastercard	Yahoo	Marriott Bonvoy
IKEA	Everlane	Greenpeace
BP ("Beyond Petroleum")	TikTok	Microsoft
Airbnb	Meta	Nestlé
Twitter → X	Robinhood	Adobe
Dove	MUJI	Adidas
Oatly	McDonald's	Nike

*For the full results in excel contact the writer.*

## Analysis

The analysis was conducted as described in Chapter 2. For the full analysis excel please contact the writer.

## Appendix 3: Transformative Branding workshop design

### Preparations

Before the workshop itself, a lot of preparation needs to be done by the organiser to maximise value during the workshop.

#### *Desk research to find facts and feelings*

Before interacting with participants, the facilitator conducts lightweight desk research to gather:

- Mission, vision, and values statements.
- Social media presence, tone of voice, and brand expression.
- Public reviews, user sentiments, media coverage.
- Organisational structure and current strategic priorities.

This establishes a baseline "external view" and helps the facilitator identify likely tension fields in advance, a learning taken directly from frog, where pre-preparation enhanced analytic depth and workshop fluency.

#### *Survey populus to find facts and feelings*

For the ultimate preparations into the 'image' part of the sensing phase it would be great to make use of a survey populus, that consists of a generalisable size, where you can leverage the needed insights to further deepen and validate the facts and feelings found during the desk research.

#### *Survey group to find facts and feelings + homework*

A short survey is sent to participants (~1 week in advance) to capture:

- How employees describe the brand
- Perceived strengths and misalignments
- Aspirations for the brand's future
- Key frustrations or cultural frictions

After the survey, each participant completes the preparation booklet, consisting of four reflection prompts (facts + feelings), the questions in the survey already triggers some possible answers:

- How would I describe our brand in my own words?
- How do I see this brand in five years?
- Who is our brand's target group today?
- What do I think that target group really thinks about our brand?

These reflections prime participants for honest introspection and activate a 'sensing mode' even before the workshop begins. By doing so, they reduce social filtering (a limitation observed at BIRD) and improve the quality of inputs (as demonstrated at frog). Overall, this preparatory step surfaces silent knowledge and ensures the sensing phase starts with richer, more grounded material for the 'vision' and 'culture' components of the V-C-I.

## **Meeting with the client**

A 20 to 30-minute alignment call during the preparations of the workshop ensures:

- Agreement on the depth of theory explanation
- Clarification of the organisation's goals (e.g., brand clarity, cultural alignment, innovation ambitions)
- Expectations about workshop outcomes
- Any sensitive issues that may influence facilitation

This was a key insight from the BIRD workshop, where tailoring the theory depth ensured understanding.

## **Facilitator preparation**

Before the workshop, the facilitator prepares:

- A, with information from preparation booklet, surveys and research, filled reflection canvas, resulting in an
- extensive V-C-I (Vision-Culture-Image) canvas giving
- initial tension fields to probe.

## **Survey group to find facts and feelings + homework**

A short survey is sent to participants (~1 week in advance) to capture:

- How employees describe the brand
- Perceived strengths and misalignments
- Aspirations for the brand's future
- Key frustrations or cultural frictions

After the survey, each participant completes the preparation booklet, consisting of four reflection prompts (facts + feelings), the questions in the survey already triggers some possible answers:

- How would I describe our brand in my own words?
- How do I see this brand in five years?
- Who is our brand's target group today?
- What do I think that target group really thinks about our brand?

These reflections prime participants for honest introspection and activate a 'sensing mode' even before the workshop begins. By doing so, they reduce social filtering (a limitation observed at BIRD) and improve the quality of inputs (as demonstrated at frog). Overall, this preparatory step surfaces silent knowledge and ensures the sensing phase starts with richer, more grounded material for the 'vision' and 'culture' components of the V-C-I.

## Workshop materials

- 5–8 posters – AO recommended
  - 1 Reflection Canvas
  - 1 V-C-I Canvas
  - 2–4 Tension Field Ideation Posters (depending on participants numbers – 1 per 3/4)
  - 1 Transformation Roadmap Canvas
- Screen or projector
- Laptop (facilitator)
- Sticky notes (3–4 colours)
- Writing material
- Timer or visible clock (can also be done on laptop)

Learnings from test workshops highlight the importance of:

- A stable room (no external factors being able to disturb the flow)
  - 30 minutes pre-access and post-access, for preparations and clean up.
- Wall space to place the posters
- Taking photos of the results after each step

## Workshop duration

For standard use, this timeframe is suggested:

390 minutes (6,5 hours), including two breaks; 10 minutes between sensing and seizing, 60 minutes for lunch between seizing and transforming.

## Participants

Optimal group size: 6–12 people

Diverse across:

- Hierarchy (include seniors but limit C-level to 1 per group)
- Functions (at least some marketing or branding representatives)
- Tenure

Based on learning from BIRD and frog:

- Group leaders should be the least senior participants.
- Facilitation should monitor overly vocal senior members (the ideation should not become a board meeting, but a creative session).
- Mix energy levels and character traits intentionally.

## Workshop structure

Transformative Branding is framed as a dynamic capability (Teece, et al., 1997) that enables brands to:

- Sense change in culture, behaviour, markets, and society
- Seize opportunities by mobilising creativity and resources
- Transform through long-term, authentic alignment

Responsible Design Thinking (Baldassare, et al., 2024) ensures the process remains:

- Ethical
- Reflective
- Generationally aware
- Societally grounded

### ***Opening + Introduction (20 minutes)***

**Goal: establish psychological safety and shared intent to enable honest participation and equal contribution.**

#### **Steps**

##### **1. Welcome**

Introductions of facilitator(s) and the purpose of the workshop.

##### **2. Participant introductions**

Around the room each participant should state their:

- Name
- Role
- Years of experience
- Warm-up: "Which brand do you admire for staying authentic through change?"

##### **3. Explain workshop purpose and goals**

"We are here to explore how your brand can transform authentically, based on who you are, who you want to be, and how the world sees you."

### ***Theoretic foundation (duration dependent on agreed upon length - classic + Q&A = 30 minutes)***

**Goal: create a shared conceptual lens that allows participants to recognise and articulate organisational dynamics without requiring theoretical expertise.**

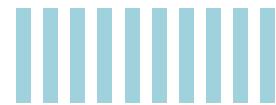
#### **Steps**

##### **1. Explain Transformative Branding at the agreed depth.**

Include:

- Why it matters now (generational transitions, ESG, authenticity)
- Connection to organisational capability building
- Why stakeholders co-create brand meaning
- Examples from practice if applicable

Keep it short but inspiring.



## Phase 1: Sensing (80 minutes)

**Goal:** reveal misalignments (tensions) in vision, culture, and image.

### Steps

#### 1. Reflection (20 minutes - 5 minutes per sector)

Participants add sticky notes to the Reflection Canvas:

- Facts ("What do we do?").
- Feelings ("What does it feel like internally?").

Prompt:

"What do you want to see? And what do you see now?"

#### 2. V-C-I Canvas (30 minutes - 10 minutes per sector)

Start by modelling how to move sticky notes:

- Place 1-2 examples.
- Let participants place the rest.

Prompt:

"While moving the notes, ask yourself: Do I see similarities? Contradictions? Surprises?"

#### 3. Identify tension fields (30 minutes)

Facilitator helps synthesise:

- Vision-Culture gaps.
- Culture-Image gaps.
- Vision-Image contradictions.

### Output

- A minimum of 1 tension field post-it for each group to tackle one, labelled:
  - Internal/external.
  - Type of mismatch.
  - Authenticity or sustainability relevance.
- All possible tension fields found, but with a prioritisation for what to tackle inside the workshop.

**BREAK - 10 minutes**



## Phase 2: Seizing (120 minutes)

Goal: turn tensions into opportunity spaces.

### Group formation (5 minutes)

Mixed groups:

- 1 senior
- 1–2 mid-level
- 1 junior (group leader)

### Process (115 minutes)

#### 1. Define the problem (15 minutes)

Using How Might We (HMW) questions:

- How might we resolve this tension in an authentic way?
- How might we align internal culture with external expectations?

#### 2. Ideate (60 minutes)

Use:

- Idea clusters
- Value-impact mapping
- Behavioural prompts
- Stakeholder mapping

Support the "risk group" early (dominant seniors / insecure juniors).

#### 3. Prepare presentation (10 minutes)

5-minute concept pitch:

- Tension field
- Underlying problem
- Key ideas
- Expected value
- Authenticity check

#### 4. Group presentations (10 minutes per group)

Cross-pollinate insights. Give space after each 5-minute presentation for at least 5 minutes of discussion and during add sticky notes from the discussion to the tension field ideation poster.

### Output

Tension field ideation posters including:

- Insight into the tension field.
- Tangible actions.
- Added brand and societal value.

### LUNCH - 60 minutes

### Phase 3: Transforming (60 minutes)

**Goal:** turn concepts into concrete actions and long-term direction.

#### Steps

##### 1. Transformation roadmap (40 minutes)

Collectively determine:

- End-goal and timeline (1-5 years)
- Intermediate goals
- Short-term actions (0-6 months)
- Required capabilities
- Stakeholders
- Metrics

C-level should only set the timeframe, not dominate content. They will be needed for making everything actionable and that step can be taken after the workshop.

##### 2. Enablers & barriers (20 minutes)

Identify in order (ending on enablers – for a positive mindset):

- Structural barriers (organisation, roles, resources)
- Mindset barriers
- Existing enablers
- Enablers that appear after certain actions are completed (insight from frog)

#### Output

A complete Transformation Roadmap canvas with a clear actionable plan, end goals, and timeline to achieve these goals, aided by identified barriers and enablers.

### Wrap-up + Reflection (10 minutes)

**Goal:** consolidate insights into shared understanding and individual reflection to support ownership and continued transformation beyond the workshop.

#### Discussion questions

- What inspired you most today?
- What's one action you can take tomorrow to continue this transformation?
- What did you learn about our brand today?
- What tension surprised you most?
- What capability do you need to build next?

#### Next steps

1. Share the roadmap internally
2. Link outputs to strategy cycles
3. Propose follow-up workshop in 3-6 months

### ***Aftercare: embedding the capability***

**Goal: ensure the workshop leads to real capability building.**

Recommended actions after each workshop:

- Send a synthesis PDF with:
  - The completed roadmap
  - All tension fields discovered (also next to the ones worked out in the workshop)
  - Digitalised versions of all canvases
  - Summary of insights
- Conduct 20-minute follow-up calls with group leaders

Facilitate an alignment session with senior management

- Offer a "capability activation" package:
  - Used tools
  - Templates for further workshops internally

Long-term actions for further capability building:

- Quarterly sensing refresh
- Annual roadmap renewal
- Creation of an internal "Brand Transformation Team"

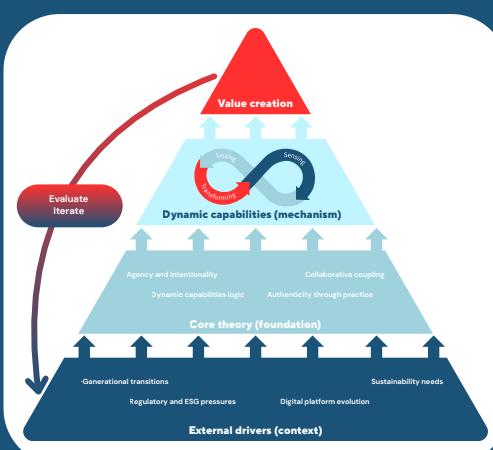
## Appendix 4: Transformative Branding workshop materials

### Preparation booklet

Figure A1

### Sensing tensions, seizing opportunities: a Transformative Branding workshop

A method to **uncover and align** your brand's transformative potential across organisational levels.



**Pre-workshop booklet**  
by Stijn Linthorst  
Developed as part of the MSc Strategic Product Design Graduation Project  
TU Delft, 2025



**About Transformative Branding**  
A strategic framework for authentic and adaptive brand evolution.

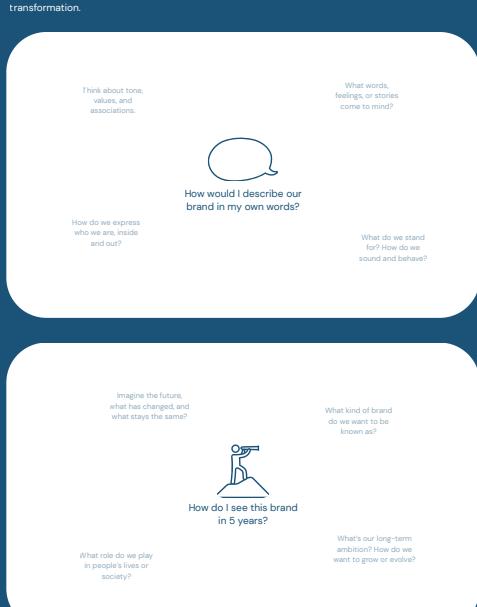
**The core concept**  
Transformative Branding views brands as dynamic systems that continuously evolve in response to societal, technological, and generational change. Rather than focusing on image control or short-term campaigns, this approach sees branding as an organizational capability, the ability to sense shifts, seize opportunities, and transform meaningfully while staying true to core values.

**Why it matters**  
Modern audiences, especially Gen Z and Gen Alpha, scrutinize whether brands live their values rather than merely communicate them. Research shows younger consumers expect transparency, ethical action, and participation in brand narratives (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Witt & Baird, 2018; Twenga, 2017).

Transformative Branding responds by shifting focus from managing perception to cultivating authenticity through aligned vision, culture, and image through the Vision-Culture-Image (V-C-I) framework (Hatch & Schultz, 2001).

### Reflection canvas

Every transformation starts with reflection. This canvas helps you express how you experience our brand today and where you think it's headed. There are no right or wrong answers, just your unique view. Together, these reflections will help us spot alignment, gaps, and opportunities for transformation.



Think about tone, values, and associations.  
What words, feelings, or stories come to mind?  
How would I describe our brand in my own words?  
How do we express who we are, inside and out?  
What do we stand for? How do we sound and behave?

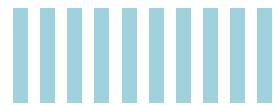
Imagine the future: what has changed, and what stays the same?  
What kind of brand do we want to be known as?  
How do I see this brand in 5 years?  
What role do we play in people's lives or society?

What's our long-term ambition? How do we want to grow or evolve?  
In what aspects are we trusted or doubted?  
How do customers describe or experience us?  
What do I think that target group really thinks about our brand?

Who do we design, communicate, and create for?  
Who is our brand's target group today?  
What are their needs, motivations, and expectations?  
Who are we really reaching, and who do we want to reach?

How do we position ourselves towards them?  
How do others talk about us, and does it match how we see ourselves?  
How consistent is what we say with what they see?

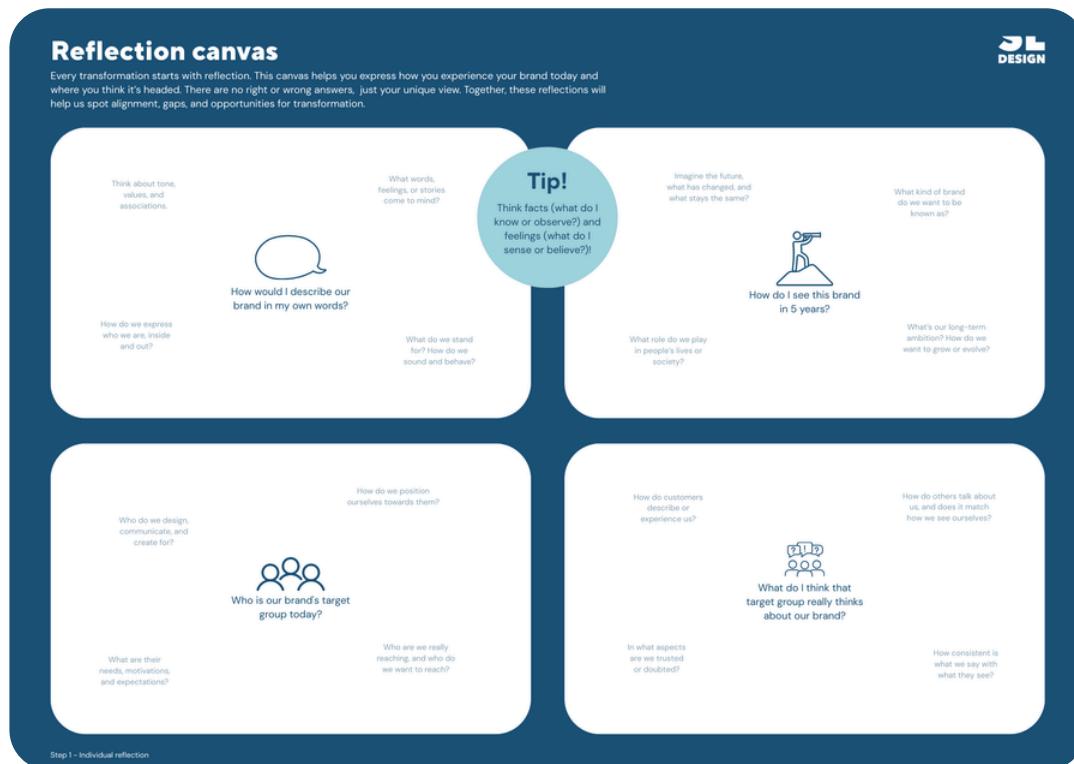
**Tip!**  
Think facts (what do I know or observe?) and feelings (what do I sense or believe?)!



## Workshop posters

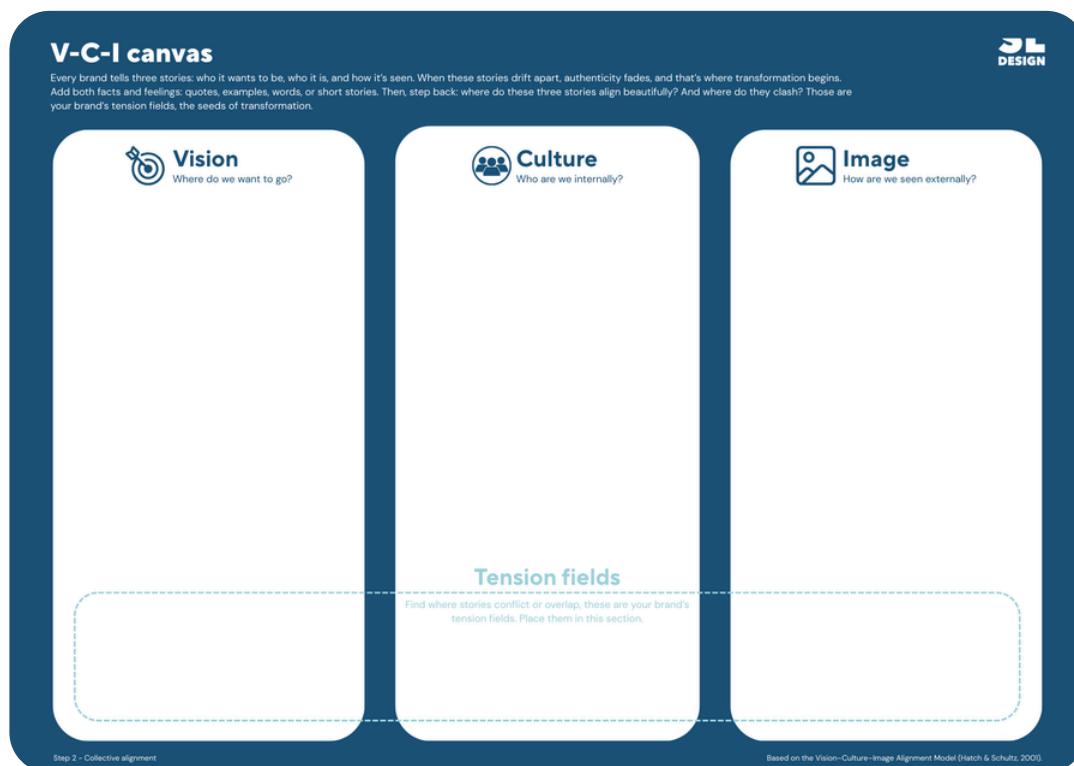
### Reflection canvas

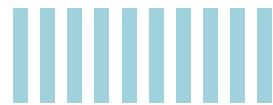
Figure A2



### V-C-I canvas

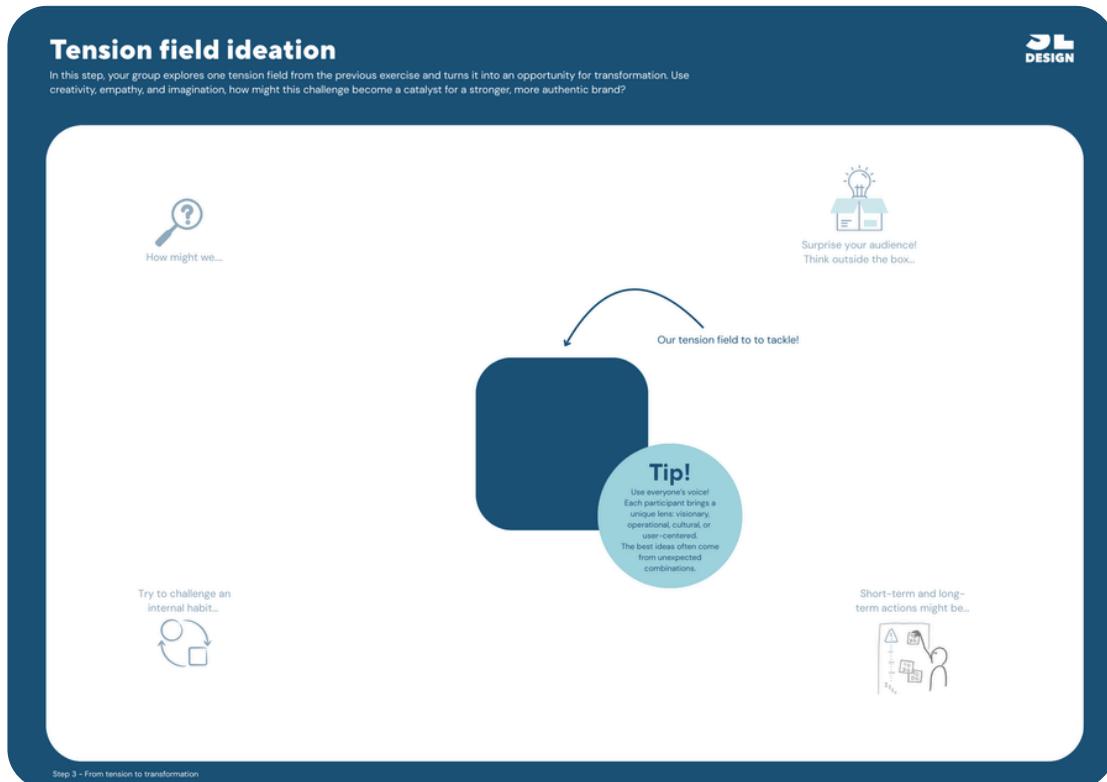
Figure A3





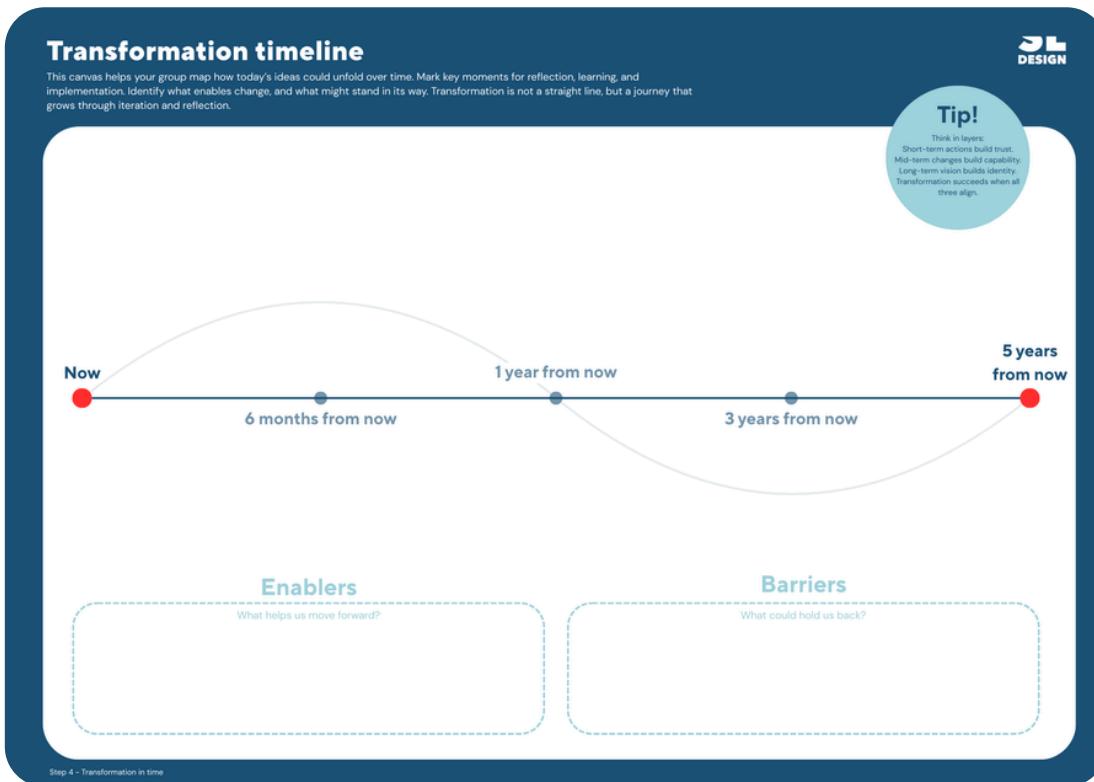
## Tension field ideation

Figure A4



## Transformation timeline

Figure A5



## Workshop slides

Figure A6



**TRANSFORMATIVE BRANDING: THE WORKSHOP**  
A method to uncover and align your brand's transformative potential across organizational levels.

**LET'S GET INTRODUCED BEFORE WE GET STARTED TRANSFORMING!**

**WHY IS TRANSFORMATION NEEDED NOW AND HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE IT?**  
We live in an era where **staying authentic means evolving continuously**. Today, we'll explore how your brand can sense change, seize opportunities, and transform responsibly.

**WHY IS TRANSFORMATION NEEDED NOW AND HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE IT?**  
We live in an era where **staying authentic means evolving continuously**. Today, we'll explore how your brand can sense change, seize opportunities, and transform responsibly.

**TODAY'S WORKSHOP SCHEDULE IN FULL**

Introduction to theory	30 minutes
Sensing (defining, identifying, sensing fields)	10 minutes
Seizing (sense-field prioritization, group iteration)	120 minutes
LUNCH	60 minutes
Transforming (combining ideas, mindmapping solutions)	60 minutes
Wrap up	10 minutes

**TRANSFORMATIVE BRANDING**  
Brands exist as **dynamic systems** connecting internal beliefs, external perceptions, and cultural forces.

**POSITIONING THE BRAND AS A DYNAMIC CAPABILITY - TRANSFORMATIVE BRANDING**

**POSITIONING THE BRAND AS A DYNAMIC CAPABILITY - TRANSFORMATIVE BRANDING**

**POSITIONING THE BRAND AS A DYNAMIC CAPABILITY - TRANSFORMATIVE BRANDING**

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**POSITIONING THE BRAND AS A DYNAMIC CAPABILITY - TRANSFORMATIVE BRANDING**

**POSITIONING THE BRAND AS A DYNAMIC CAPABILITY - TRANSFORMATIVE BRANDING**

**MULTIPLE DRIVERS ARE DEMANDING CHANGES TO BE MADE BY BRANDS**

**MULTIPLE DRIVERS ARE DEMANDING CHANGES TO BE MADE BY BRANDS**

**MULTIPLE DRIVERS ARE DEMANDING CHANGES TO BE MADE BY BRANDS**

## Workshop slides

Figure A6

**MULTIPLE DRIVERS ARE DEMANDING CHANGES TO BE MADE BY BRANDS**



14

**MULTIPLE DRIVERS ARE DEMANDING CHANGES TO BE MADE BY BRANDS**



14

**MULTIPLE DRIVERS ARE DEMANDING CHANGES TO BE MADE BY BRANDS**



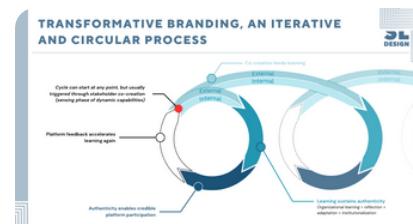
14

**TRANSFORMATIVE BRANDING, LAYERING SKILLS TO ETHICAL, SUSTAINABLE VALUE**



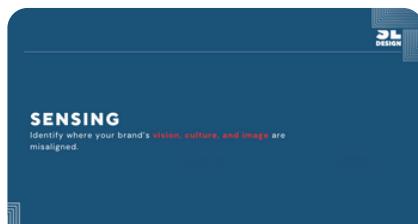
15

**TRANSFORMATIVE BRANDING, AN ITERATIVE AND CIRCULAR PROCESS**



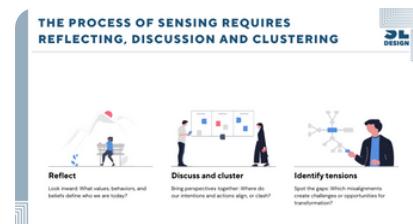
16

**SENSING**  
Identify where your brand's **vision, culture, and image** are misaligned.



17

**THE PROCESS OF SENSING REQUIRES REFLECTING, DISCUSSION AND CLUSTERING**



18

**FIRST STEP: REFLECTING ON THE CURRENT STATE OF THE BRAND**



19

**CONNECTING PERSPECTIVES THROUGH DISCUSSION AND CLUSTERING**



20

**REVEALING TENSION FIELDS AND SHARED CHALLENGES**



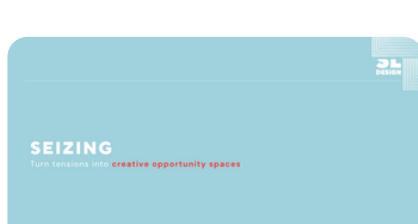
21

**BREAK**  
Turn tensions into **creative opportunity spaces**.



22

**SEIZING**  
Turn tensions into **creative opportunity spaces**



23

**THE PROCESS OF SEIZING REQUIRES COLLABORATION, IDEATION AND CREATION**



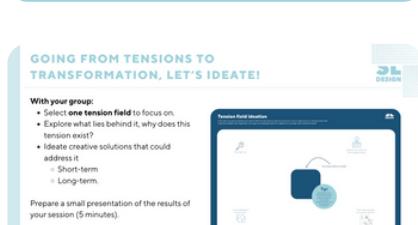
23

**DIVERSITY FUELS IDEATION: FORM CROSS-LEVEL GROUPS**



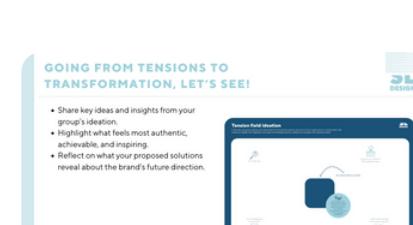
24

**GOING FROM TENSIONS TO TRANSFORMATION, LET'S IDEATE!**



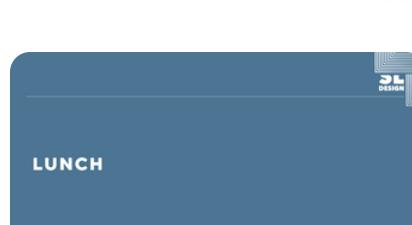
25

**GOING FROM TENSIONS TO TRANSFORMATION, LET'S IDEATE!**



26

**LUNCH**



27

## Workshop slides

Figure A6



**TRANSFORMING**  
Embed and scale the change you want to see.



**TRANSFORMING REQUIRES ALIGNMENT, ACTION AND LONG-TERM COMMITMENT**

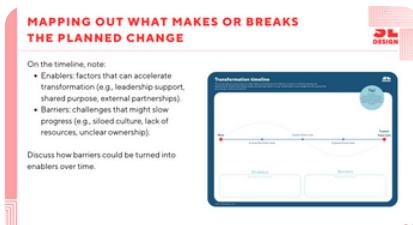
- Combine outcomes**
- Building the roadmap**
- Identifying enablers & barriers**



**TURNING IDEAS INTO ACTION: BUILDING THE TRANSFORMATION ROADMAP**

Position each idea along the timeline:

- Short-term (0-4 months): quick wins or fast wins
- Mid-term (1-2 years): embedded practices or new collaborations
- Long-term (3-5 years): structural and cultural transformation



**MAPPING OUT WHAT MAKES OR BREAKS THE PLANNED CHANGE**

On the timeline, note:

- Enablers: factors that can accelerate transformation (e.g. leadership support, shared purpose, external partnerships)
- Barriers: challenges that might slow progress (e.g. siloed culture, lack of resources, unclear ownership)

Discuss how barriers could be turned into enablers over time.



**WRAP UP**  
Transformation starts with awareness. **carry today's insights into tomorrow's actions.**



**THANK YOU FOR JOINING THE TRANSFORMATION WORKSHOP**

Take a moment to reflect:

- What inspired you most today?
- What's one action you can take tomorrow to continue this transformation?
- What did you learn about our brand today?
- What tension surprised you most?
- What capability do you need to build next?

Transformation starts with awareness, and today, you've built that awareness together.



**THANK YOU FOR JOINING THE TRANSFORMATION WORKSHOP**

Take a moment to reflect:

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- What did you learn about our brand today?
- What tension surprised you most?
- What capability do you need to build next?

Transformation starts with awareness, and today, you've built that awareness together.

**Next steps:**  
Share your roadmap internally, get the company on board!  
Link outputs to strategy cycles to keep efficiency.  
Follow-up workshop in the future to revamp transformation energy!



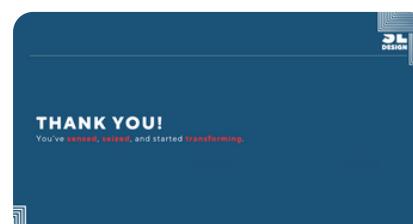
**THANK YOU FOR JOINING THE TRANSFORMATION WORKSHOP**

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- What did you learn about our brand today?
- What tension surprised you most?
- What capability do you need to build next?

Transformation starts with awareness, and today, you've built that awareness together.

 [Fill in the survey](#)



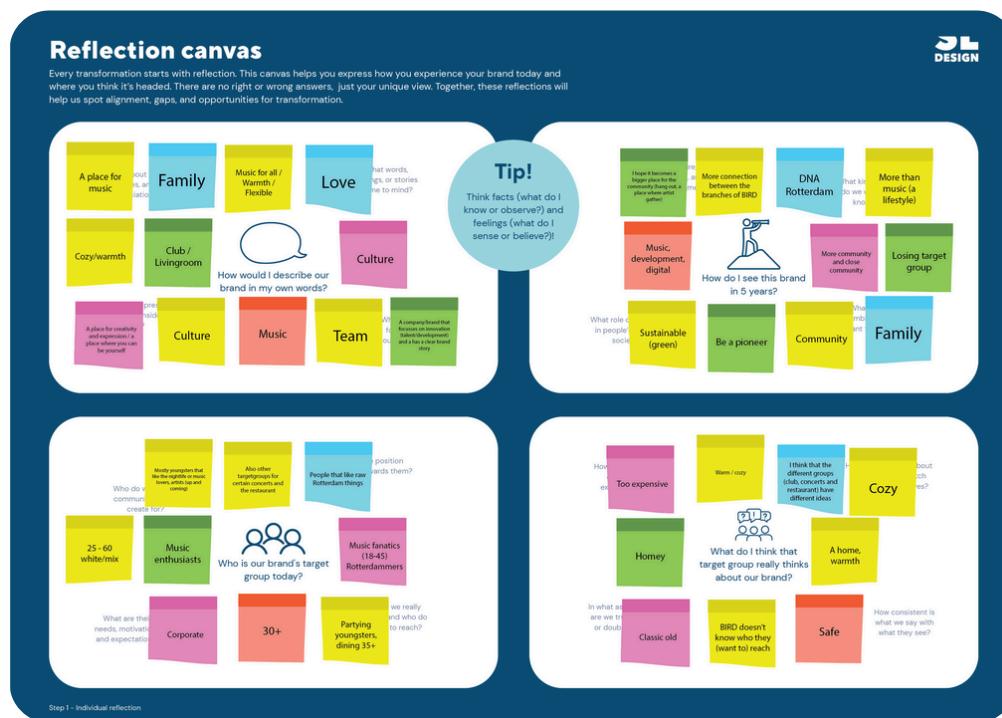
**THANK YOU!**  
You've **sensed, seized, and started transforming.**

## Appendix 5: Transformative Branding workshop test results

### BIRD Rotterdam

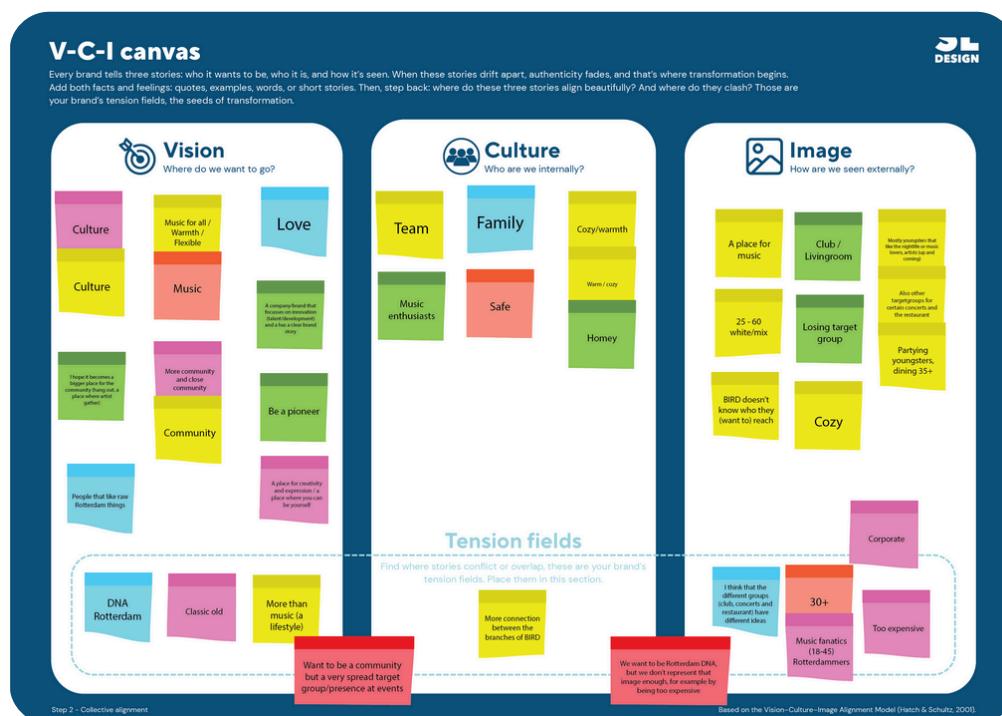
#### Reflection canvas

Figure B1



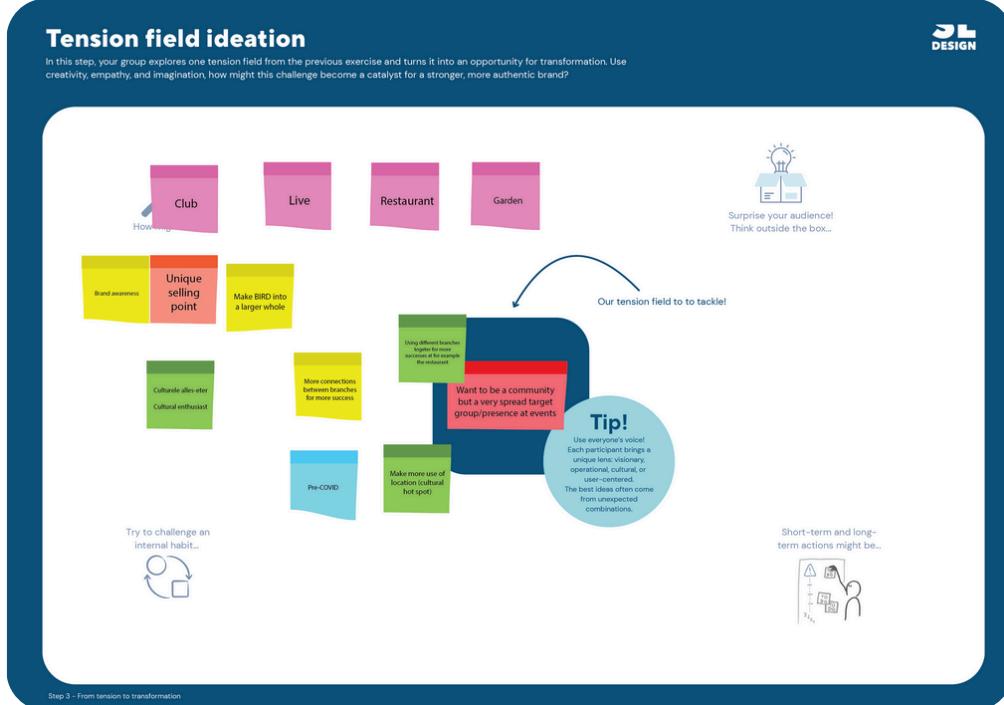
#### V-C-I canvas

Figure B2



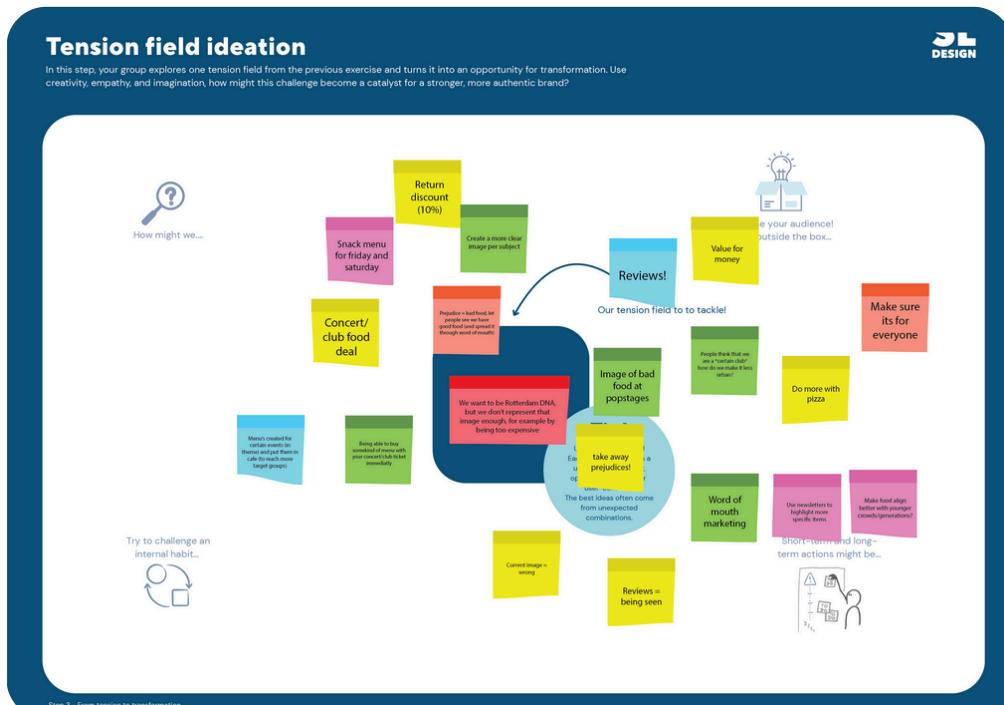
## Tension field ideation I

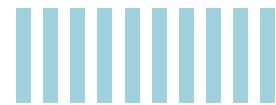
Figure B3



## Tension field ideation II

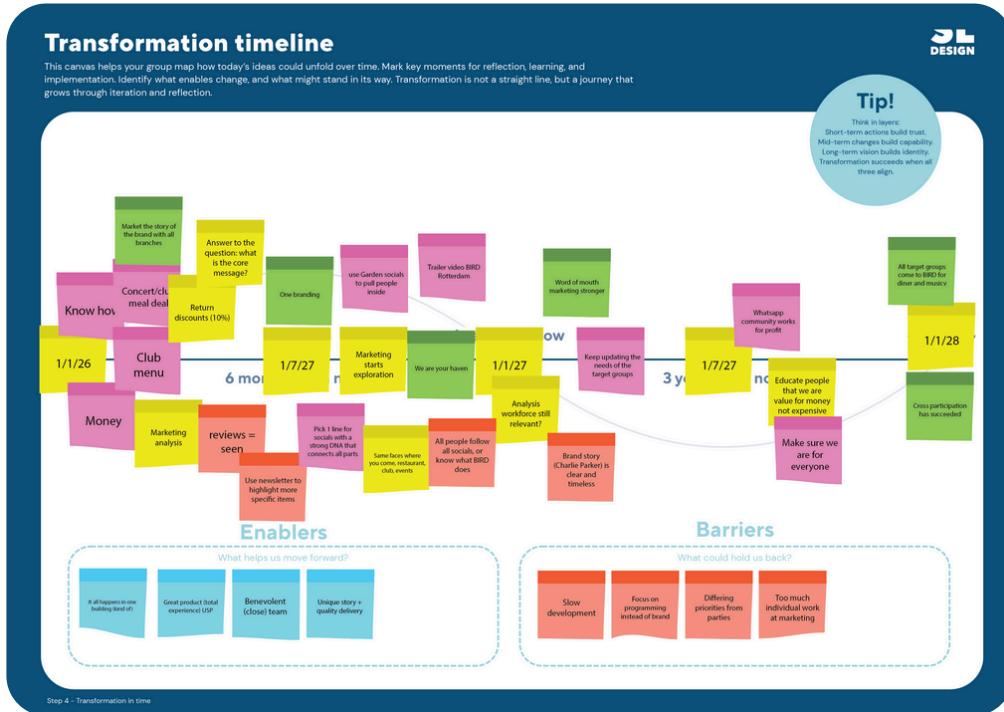
Figure B4





## Transformation timeline

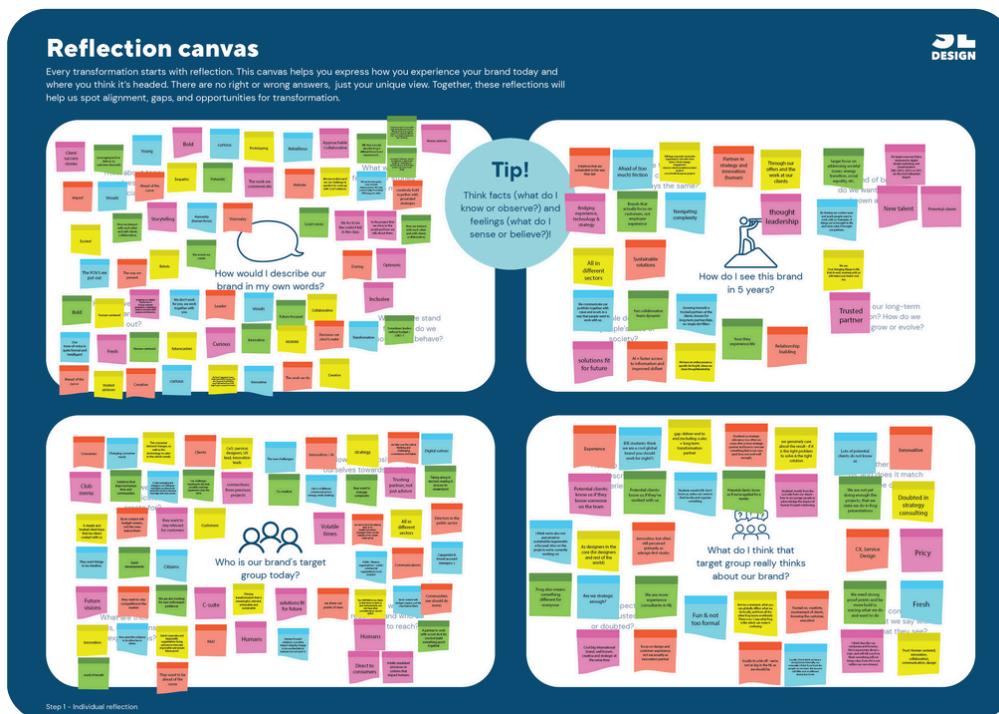
Figure B5



## frog, part of Capgemini Invent

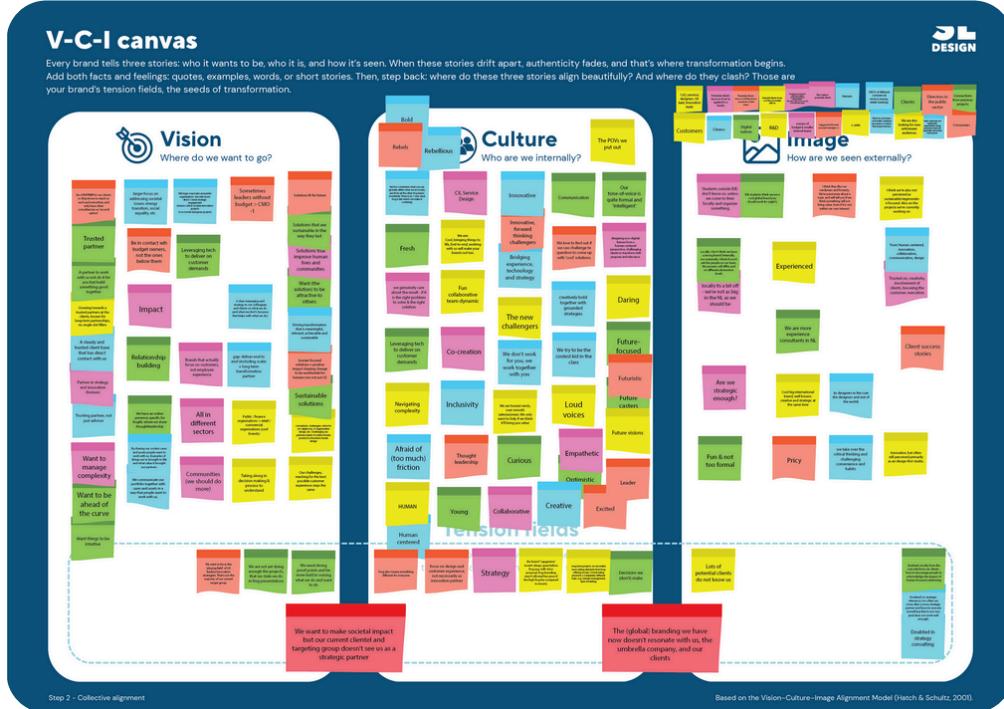
### Reflection canvas

Figure B6



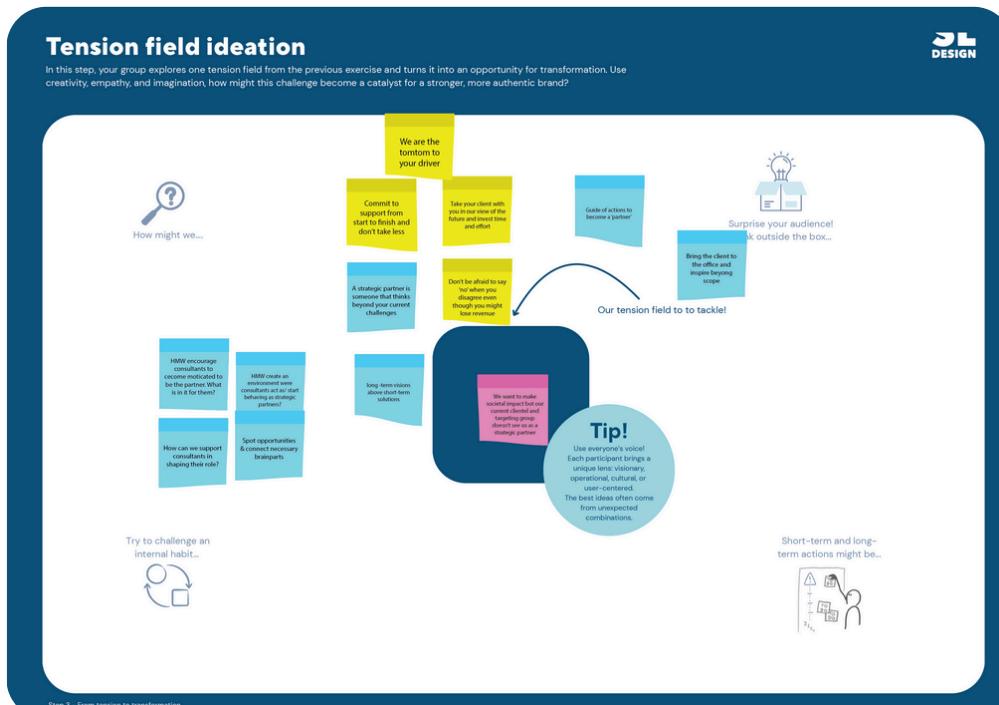
## V-C-I canvas

Figure B7



## Tension field ideation I

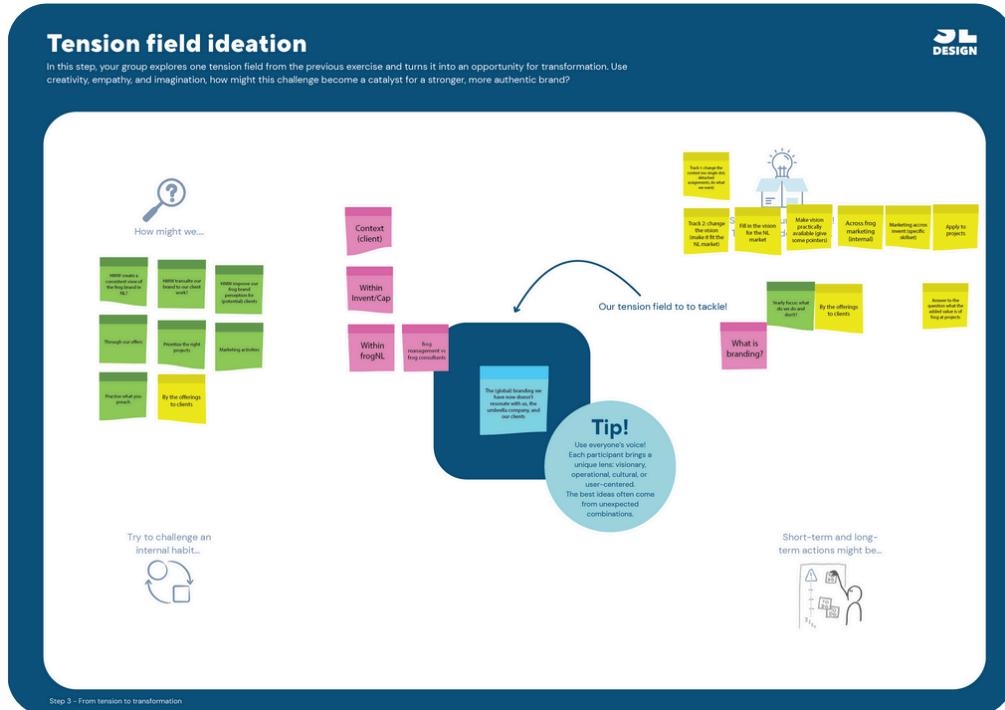
Figure B8





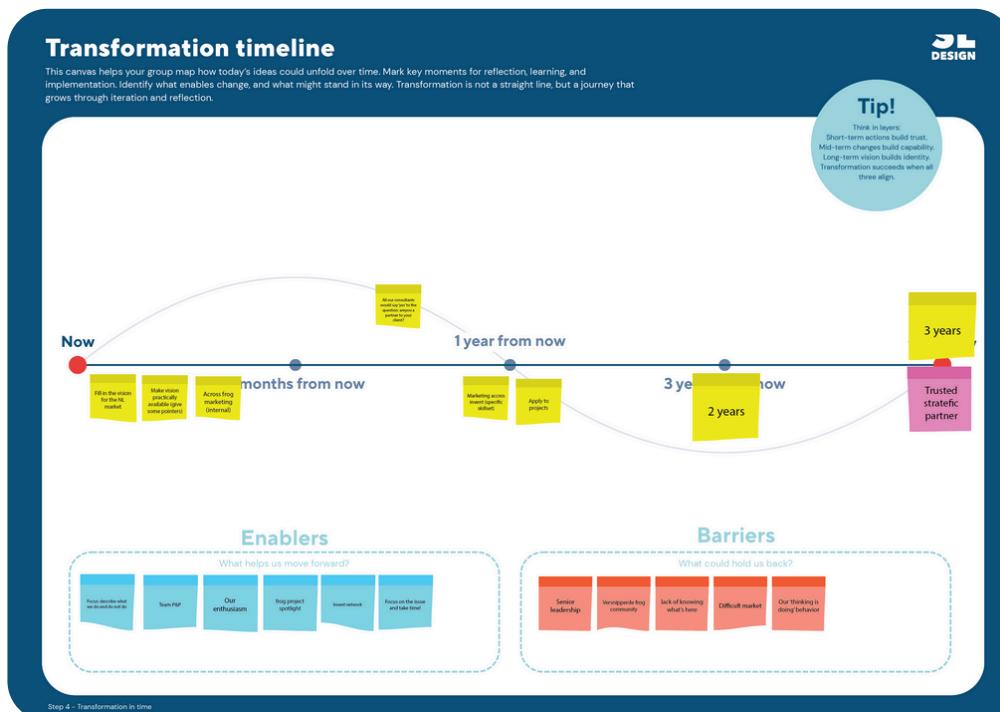
## Tension field ideation II

Figure B9



## Transformation timeline

Figure B10





## Appendix 6: Transformative Branding workshop test survey

### Start

#### *Q0 - Intro*

'Thank you for joining the workshop! Your feedback helps refine the method and understand how Transformative Branding resonates across levels. This will take about 2 minutes.'

#### *Q1 - Brand*

What brand/company do you represent?

#### *Q2 - Role*

What role did you play in today's workshop?

- Strategic thinkers (vision/leadership)
- Organizational voices (operations/process)
- Cultural representatives (team mindset/values)
- Image ambassadors (external view/communication)
- Other:

#### *Q3 - Experience and emotion, feeling*

How did this workshop make you feel?

- Inspired
- Curious
- Neutral
- Confused
- Energised
- Other:

#### *Q4 - Experience and emotion, comfort*

I felt comfortable sharing my thoughts and ideas during the workshop.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

#### *Q5 - Experience and emotion, 'aha!' moment*

What was your biggest 'aha!' moment today?

#### *Q6 - Learning and impact, feeling*

I feel that what I did today can create impact within my organisation.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

#### *Q7 - Learning and impact, insight*

The workshop helped me gain new insights or perspectives I didn't have before.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree



*Q8 – Learning and impact, sense*

I leave today with a clearer sense of how our brand could evolve or transform.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

*Q9 – Learning and impact, engaged*

How engaged did you feel during the session

- 1 – 10

*Q10 – Method and improvement, concept*

The concept of Transformative Branding became clearer to me through this session.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

*Q11 – Method and improvement, flow*

The 'sensing–seizing–transforming' flow was easy to follow and apply.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree