# FROM INTENT TO IMPACT

*Designing ways for early-stage start-ups to monitor and communicate impact*

*Graduation project by Nora Overhuijs*

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SECRID


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*Integrated Product Design*
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# Colophone

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Photo: (Secrid, 2026)

# Preface

Dear reader,

It all began at Dutch Design Week 2024, when I walked past the Secrid Impact Fund stand (see figure of colophone). It was a large, impactful space full of design driven start-ups. I felt completely intimidated, and at the same time I knew that working with creative, ambitious people like this would be my dream.

A year later I started my own venture, Dream Team Emergence, and fell even harder for the start-up spirit. The people who run start-ups may not be far along, and often work with the smallest of means, but they have a purpose, a mission, and a genuine drive to make the world better. I am one of those people too: someone who believes in a better future and in the power of making things.

So when it came time to find a graduation place, I took the risk and sent Maartje of the Secrid Impact Fund a message: *I don't know what kind of research you might need, but is there a way I could graduate with the Impact Fund?* The answer opened the door.

So there I was, leaning into one of the most complex systems out there: *impact*. It is the biggest container term of our time, and an incredibly hot topic. Everyone wants to make impact and be part of something that has it, but nobody exactly knows what impact is. Why isn't there one definition and a fixed list of criteria? Because it simply isn't that easy: impact is vast, and everyone looks at it differently. But I never walk away from a challenge, and I found my way along the impact path that came to guide this project.

Looking back, this project changed where I want to go. Through Secrid's network I saw, up close, how foundations work, which made me realise this is exactly the world I want to build my career in. What inspired me most was Secrid's culture: the way the founders, Marianne and René, have built a place where you genuinely believe in the company and where, even as a graduating student, you are truly seen.

Thank you, Jotte, Sine and Maartje! Jotte, for the remarkably sharp eye you brought to my work, and for our intense conversations, intense because we were both so passionate about the research. Sine, for your thoughtful, critical input and for keeping me focused on creating calm in my process. Maartje, for working so closely with me and giving me so many opportunities; you are sharp, attentive, and radiate energy and positivity, and we are so alike that we understood each other instinctively. A heartfelt thanks, too, to the whole Secrid Fund and sustainability team, especially Bonnie and Thomas.

Finally, to my family and friends: thank you for your endless support throughout this journey, for cheering me on, listening when I needed it, and reminding me to enjoy the process.

To you, the reader: I hope you enjoy reading this, and that my passion for the project shines through.

Greetings,

# Summary

Today's organisations are increasingly expected to make their impact visible. Driven by regulation such as the CSRD and by the demands of investors, funders, and partners, sustainability and social value can no longer simply be claimed: they must be substantiated and communicated. Yet most established impact frameworks were built for mature organisations with stable products and reliable data. For early-stage, mission-driven start-ups, they are often overwhelming, ill-fitting, and blind to the systemic change these ventures are actually working towards.

The Secrid Impact Fund, which supports early-stage, design-driven start-ups, recognised this problem first-hand: founders deeply motivated by their mission, yet struggling to make that impact visible and credible. This graduation project therefore asks:

*How can early-stage, mission-driven start-ups be supported in assessing and communicating their impact in a way that fits their context and development stage?*

The project followed a research-through-design approach, structured by the Double Diamond. Through a systemic lens on impact, an analysis of 25 existing frameworks, and interviews with founders, funders, and support actors, the research found that current tools privilege what is countable over what is meaningful, and that impact in early-stage ventures is emergent rather than fixed: shaped by the moment, the stage, and the stakeholder being addressed. From these insights, five limitations of current impact measurement were defined and translated, via 48 ideas and six tested prototypes, into one connected concept.

The result is Trace, an impact companion that travels with a venture across its year in the Secrid Impact Fund. It consists of three parts:

- An app, where founders capture small moments of impact as they happen, through four short logs.
- A quarterly report, which turns those captured moments into structured reflection and a growing impact story.
- A set of impact games, played once at the kick-off to give the cohort a shared language for impact.

Grounded in the core practices of systemic design, Trace helps founders notice, hold on to, and tell the story of their impact as it emerges. It was evaluated with founders through usability sessions and a two- to four-week test, assessing whether it strengthens their impact story and fits the reality of early-stage work.

Beyond the design itself, the project shows the value of a systemic, designerly perspective for the Secrid Impact Fund: one that treats impact not as a number to report, but as a story to develop over time.

# Glossary

**Building relations** — A core practice of systemic design: cultivating the institutional, cultural, and material relations that shape how change unfolds, beyond simple stakeholder engagement.

**Double Diamond** — A design-process model of four phases (Discover, Define, Develop, Deliver) that structures this project.

**Entry point** — Where a designer or actor enters a system, a choice that shapes which actors are engaged and which framings become possible.

**Framing complexity** — A core practice of systemic design: making sense of patterns, relationships, and leverage points in a system, and using that understanding to open up new problem framings.

**Impact** — The long-term, positive or negative effects that an action, organisation, product, or system has on environmental, social, and economic systems, including indirect and unintended consequences.

**Impact communication** — The process of translating evidence and insight about impact into forms that are credible and meaningful for different stakeholders.

**Impact monitoring** — The ongoing, systematic collection and review of information about activities, outputs, and emerging effects, to understand whether an initiative is moving towards its intended impact. Continuous, unlike a one-off evaluation.

**Leverage points** — Places within a complex system where a relatively small shift can lead to larger change; deeper leverage points (rules, goals, paradigms) are the most transformative but the hardest to measure (Meadows, 1999).

**Meaningful formgiving** — A core practice of systemic design: giving shape to interventions, through both narrative tools (maps, scenarios) and tangible artefacts that mobilise actors towards change.

**Mission-driven / mission-oriented innovation** — Innovation that starts from a shared societal direction rather than isolated problem-solving, working through a broad portfolio of cooperating efforts towards a desired future.

**Niche** — A protected space where new practices and alternatives emerge through small-scale experimentation before they stabilise or scale.

**Nurturing reflexivity** — A core practice of systemic design: staying attentive to one's own assumptions, values, and position throughout the process.

**Research-through-design** — A research approach in which designing and making are themselves the means of generating knowledge.

**Ripple effect** — How a targeted local intervention extends outward through new connections, shifts in practice, and chains of unintended consequences.

**System-shifting design** — Within systemic design, the most ambitious intention: deliberately helping move a system in a desired direction.

**Systemic design** — A field that combines systems thinking and design to respond to complex societal challenges.

**Theory of Change** — A causal logic explaining how activities are expected to contribute to a chain of results and, eventually, to broader impact.

**Venture philanthropy** — A form of support that offers funding, guidance, visibility, and access to networks without taking equity or ownership; the model through which the Secrid Impact Fund supports its start-ups.

**Wicked problem** — A complex, open-ended societal problem that cannot be clearly bounded, overseen by a single actor, or solved by one organisation alone.

**X-curve** — A transition model that frames systemic change as the interaction between the build-up of the new and the phase-out of the old.

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# I. INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH

*Impact has become something every start-up is now expected to prove, yet the tools to do so were built for mature companies. This part introduces Secrid and its Impact Fund, frames that mismatch as the core problem, and sets out the research question and approach.*


01 Introduction

02 Context

03 Problem Framing

04 Research approach

# 01 Introduction

In recent years, organizations have increasingly been expected to make their impact visible. In the European context, this demand for transparency is no longer voluntary. Through the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), many companies are now required to disclose information about their environmental and social impacts, as well as the sustainability-related risks and opportunities relevant to their business (Hummel et al., 2024), see figure 1. As a result, sustainability and impact are no longer treated as optional ambitions or branding claims, but as issues that need to be substantiated and communicated in transparent ways (Du Toit, 2024). This growing demand comes from multiple directions: governments and regulators call for greater accountability, while investors, consumers, funding organizations, and supply chain partners increasingly expect evidence of how organizations create value beyond financial performance (Hummel et al., 2024). Stakeholders want to understand not only what a company produces, but also how its activities contribute to or harm environmental, social, and economic systems (European Commission, 2023).

As a result, organizations are increasingly asked to provide evidence-based claims about topics such as carbon emissions, material use, labor conditions, circularity, accessibility, and long-term value creation. Such evidence supports transparency and accountability but can also help organizations make strategic decisions and communicate their direction more clearly (Du Toit, 2024). To do so, companies often rely on established impact measurement frameworks and tools. Certification systems such as B Corp assessments require organizations to substantiate their social, environmental, and governance performance (About B Corp Certification, n.d.). Similarly, reporting standards such as ESG frameworks and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) guide organizations in disclosing sustainability performance in more structured and comparable ways (European Commission, 2023). For environmental performance in particular, Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) has become one of the most widely used tools, helping organizations calculate impacts across the life cycle of a product.

*(Sreenivasalu, 2024)*

*(Kwart Nederlandse Bedrijven..., 2023)*

*(Van Lonkhuyzen, 2024)*

*Figure 1 New articles on urgency manatory ESG reporting*

However, most existing impact measurement tools are primarily designed for relatively mature organizations with stable operations, available datasets, and the resources to perform detailed assessments. They are often quantitative, data-intensive, and dependent on specialised expertise. While such

approaches may be appropriate for large companies, they are much harder to apply in the context of small and early-stage ventures. Start-ups often lack the time, financial resources, and reliable data needed to perform comprehensive assessments (Setyaningsih et al., 2024). In addition, their products, value propositions, and markets are still evolving, making static models difficult to apply in innovation-driven contexts (Kumar et al., 2025).

This challenge becomes especially relevant for start-ups that aim to contribute to environmental or social transitions. Many mission-driven start-ups work on circular materials, regenerative production, fair value chains, or new ways of meeting social needs. (Bergmann & Utikal, 2021) Their contribution often lies not only in measurable outcomes, but also in the alternatives they propose, the behaviours they influence, and the systems they seek to challenge. Yet these forms of impact are often difficult to capture through existing frameworks, which tend to prioritise measurable, standardised, and already proven forms of value. (OECD, n.d.)

At the same time, these start-ups still need to communicate their impact. They must convince investors, funding organisations, partners, and broader publics that their work is relevant, credible, and worth supporting. This creates a tension: the need to communicate impact is already urgent, while the available tools are often not suited to the uncertainty, complexity, and developmental nature of early-stage innovation. In this context, the question is not only how impact can be measured, but also how it can be understood, monitored, and communicated in ways that fit the reality of emerging start-ups.

One organisation that recognises this problem from close is Secrid, and more specifically the Secrid Impact Fund. As a fund that supports early-stage, mission-driven start-ups, Secrid kept running into the same difficulty among the ventures it backs: founders who were deeply motivated by their social and environmental ambitions, yet struggled to make that impact visible and credible to funders, partners, and broader publics. It is from this position, looking through the eyes of Secrid and the start-ups it supports, that this project approaches the challenge.

# 02 Context

**To dive into this context, it is important to briefly introduce the three central actors: Secrid, the Secrid Impact Fund, and the start-ups supported by the fund (see figure 2). The following sections therefore outline each of these actors in relation to the broader context of this graduation project.**

## 2.1 Secrid

Secrid is a Dutch family-owned design company founded by René van Geer and Marianne van Sasse van Ysselt. The company is known for its card wallets but positions itself more broadly as a design-driven business that aims to contribute to a better industry. Central to Secrid's philosophy is the idea that the next industrial era should not be about producing more, but about producing better. Secrid describes this as a shift from the logic of the Industrial Revolution toward Industrial Evolution: a holistic design approach in which products are developed with attention to quality, longevity, local production, and social and environmental responsibility. (Secrid, 2026)

Sustainability is therefore not treated as a side topic, but as part of Secrid's overall vision and way of working. It is a Certified B Corporation, meaning that the company is assessed on broader themes such as governance, workers, community, environment, and customers.

## 2.2 Secrid Impact Fund

The Secrid Impact Fund extends Secrid's philosophy into the field of early-stage entrepreneurship. Through the fund, Secrid supports designers and start-ups that work on better and more positively impactful products with donating 1% of their revenues. Rather than functioning as a traditional investor, the fund can be described more accurately as a form of *venture philanthropy*: it offers financial support, guidance, visibility, and access to networks, without taking equity or ownership. (Secrid, 2026)

This makes the fund less a conventional investment model and more a springboard for early-stage, design-driven ventures. Its role is not primarily to control or scale companies through financial return, but to help promising initiatives move forward. In practice, the fund does this through three main functions: support, inspire, and connect.

First, it *supports* designers with donations, mentoring, and advice on topics such as financing, production, legal structure, organisational development, and marketing. Second, it *inspires* broader audiences by sharing stories of designers and their work through interviews, documentaries, exhibitions, and communication campaigns. Third, it *connects* designers to relevant partners, such as media platforms, industry actors, support organisations, and events like Dutch Design Week, where selected designers receive public exposure through the Secrid Talent Podium.

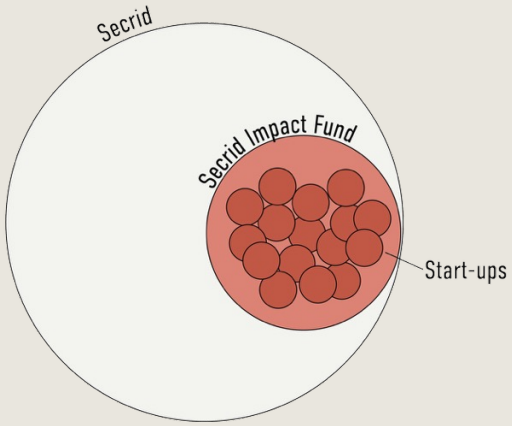



*Figure 2 Ecosystem of Secrid, Secrid impact fund and the start-ups*

## 2.3 The start-ups of the Secrid Impact Fund

The start-ups connected to the Secrid Impact Fund are typically early-stage, mission-driven, and impact-oriented ventures. Unlike conventional start-ups, which often prioritise rapid growth and investor value, these ventures combine economic aims with explicit social and environmental ambitions. Their work relates to broader sustainability transitions, such as circular production, regenerative materials, social inclusion, and alternative ways of designing and making products.

Many of these start-ups enter the fund at around Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 3 to 5, meaning they are still in an early phase of prototyping and validation. Their ideas show clear potential but are not yet fully developed or market ready.

The ventures supported by the fund span a wide range of sectors, including health, food and farming, packaging, the built environment, biodiversity, textiles, biodesign, and biobased materials (see Figure 4 for examples). In particular, the built environment, textiles, and biobased materials appear regularly. Because the selected start-ups differ each year, the fund brings together a broad variety of projects and highlights that impact can take different forms depending on the domain and societal challenge.

*Figure 3 Secrid talent podium at DDW (Secrid, 2026)*

*Figure 4 Secrid Impact Fund start-ups 2025 (Secrid, 2026)*

# 03 Problem Framing

**This chapter defines the problem this project sets out to address. It moves from the original assignment within the Secrid Impact Fund to a sharper articulation of the core problem, the main research question, and the scope that bounds the work.**

## 3.1 Project context and initial assignment

This graduation project originated from a question raised within the Secrid Impact Fund. Through the fund, Secrid already supports early-stage start-ups in multiple ways. One area, however, proved more difficult to support in practice: helping start-ups make their impact visible and communicable. For Secrid, this challenge emerged repeatedly in conversations with supported start-up. Many of these start-ups were highly motivated by social or environmental ambitions yet found it difficult to explain and measure their impact in a clear and credible way, and to communicate it to Secrid, funders, partners, or other external actors.

As a result, the initial assignment of this project was to explore how the Secrid Impact Fund could better support start-ups in assessing and communicating their impact.

## 3.2 The core problem

For early-stage start-ups in general, the problem lies in the tools available to them. Most established impact frameworks were developed for larger, more mature organisations with stable products, processes, and substantial data, and they tend to be built around quantitative measurement, capturing what can be counted rather than the broader, systemic change that mission-driven start-ups are actually working towards.

Early-stage ventures, by contrast, have limited time, data, expertise, and financial resources, and their work is dynamic and still evolving. Their impact is therefore often visible through stories, prototypes, collaborations, and pilot projects rather than through formal metrics or standardised reporting. At the same time, these start-ups are increasingly expected to make their impact credible and visible to funders, partners, support organisations, and broader publics. This creates a clear tension: the demand for impact evidence is growing, while the frameworks meant to provide it do not fit the reality of early-stage work.

The problem addressed in this project can therefore be understood as a mismatch between the realities of early-stage, mission-driven start-ups and the assumptions embedded in conventional impact frameworks.

## 3.3 Research question

Based on this problem framing, the project is guided by one main research question:

*How can early-stage, mission-driven start-ups be supported in assessing and communicating their impact in a way that fits their context and development stage?*

## 3.4 Scope of the project

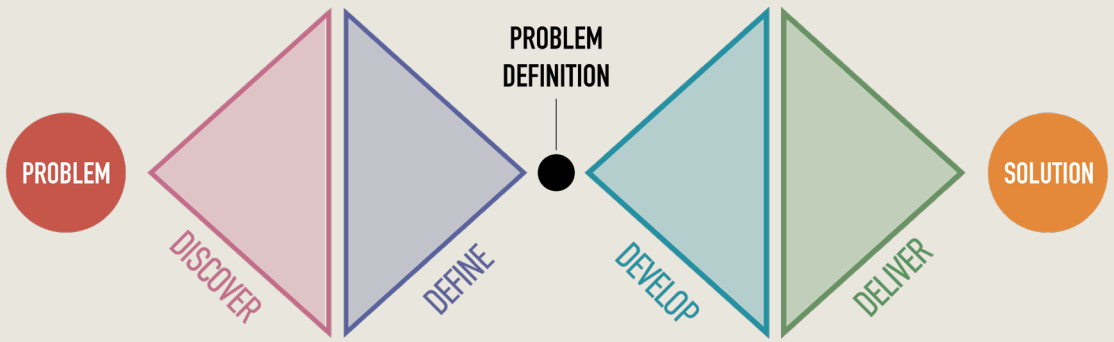
This project focuses specifically on the context of the Secrid Impact Fund and the early-stage start-ups connected to it. The research does not aim to develop a universal framework for all organisations, nor does it focus on compliance-driven sustainability reporting for large corporations. Instead, it concentrates on the monitoring and communication impact in a way that is relevant and usable for start-ups in an early phase of development.

# 04 Research approach

**This chapter describes how the project was carried out. It explains the overall research-through-design approach, the Double Diamond structure that organised the work, and the research activities that sit behind each phase.**

## 4.1 Overall approach

The project followed a research-through-design approach, structured through the Double Diamond. Rather than a strictly linear method, the phases overlapped and the work moved back and forth as understanding grew. The approach was bottom-up: it started from the context of the Secrid Impact Fund and the lived experience of the start-ups, complemented and challenged by literature and framework analysis. The four phases also organise the structure of this report (Figure 5).




**PROBLEM**
Context framing
Problem definition

**DISCOVER**
Literature review
Systemic lens
Framework analysis
Start-up interviews
Expert & funder interviews

**DEFINE**
Synthesis
Key insights
Limitations of frameworks

**DEVELOP**
Exploration directions
Ideation framework
Co-creation sessions
Six prototypes
Prototype testing

**DELIVER**
Concept selection
Final design (Trace)
Evaluation
Recommendations
Reflection

**SOLUTION**
Discussion
Reflection

*Figure 5 Dubble Diamond research phases*

## 4.2 The four design phases

### Discover

Discover opened up the problem space through three research streams: a systemic lens on impact (Chapter 5), an analysis of existing impact frameworks (Chapter 6), and exploratory interviews with start-ups and the actors that support and fund them (Chapter 7).

### Define

Define synthesised these into key insights and the limitations of current approaches (Section 7.6), framing the design challenge.

### Develop

Develop translated those limitations into ideas and, via the C-Box, six prototypes that were tested with start-ups (Chapters 8 and 9).

### Deliver

Deliver developed the selected concept into the final design, Trace (Chapters 10) and evaluated it with start-ups (Chapters 11).

## 4.3 Research activities

Across these phases, the project combined a literature review, a framework analysis with a cross-framework inventory of recurring metrics, an analysis of the Secrid start-ups and their trajectories, semi-structured interviews with five start-ups and with supporting and funding actors, co-creation sessions, prototype testing, and a final evaluation with founders (see Figure 4).

## 4.4 Project Stakeholder Overview

Throughout this project, I spoke with a wide range of people within the context, which was essential to understanding what the problem actually is. Than meant interview start-ups, funding organisations, researchers and impact experts.

### Core team

The core team guided the project throughout. I was supervised by Jotte de Koning and Sine Celik from TU Delft, and more specifically the Systemic Design Lab. From Secrid, Maartje Janse, head of the Secrid Impact Fund.. With this core team I ran the project intensively, meeting on an almost weekly basis.

### Involved stakeholders

Beyond the core team, I spoke with a wider group of stakeholders to understand the problem from multiple angles. Most were engaged through semi-structured interviews, and with some I also ran co-creation sessions:

- *Researchers on systemic design*: four PhD researchers working on systemic design and complex systems.
- *Funding organisations*: five large funding organisations within the Netherland.
- *Start-ups*: twelve start-ups within the Secrid Impact Fund and two start-ups outside it.
- *Impact and sustainability experts*: two independent impact experts and two experts from the Secrid team.

The start-ups and funding organisations were especially important for building an accurate picture of the problem, and together all these people broadened my perspective on impact.

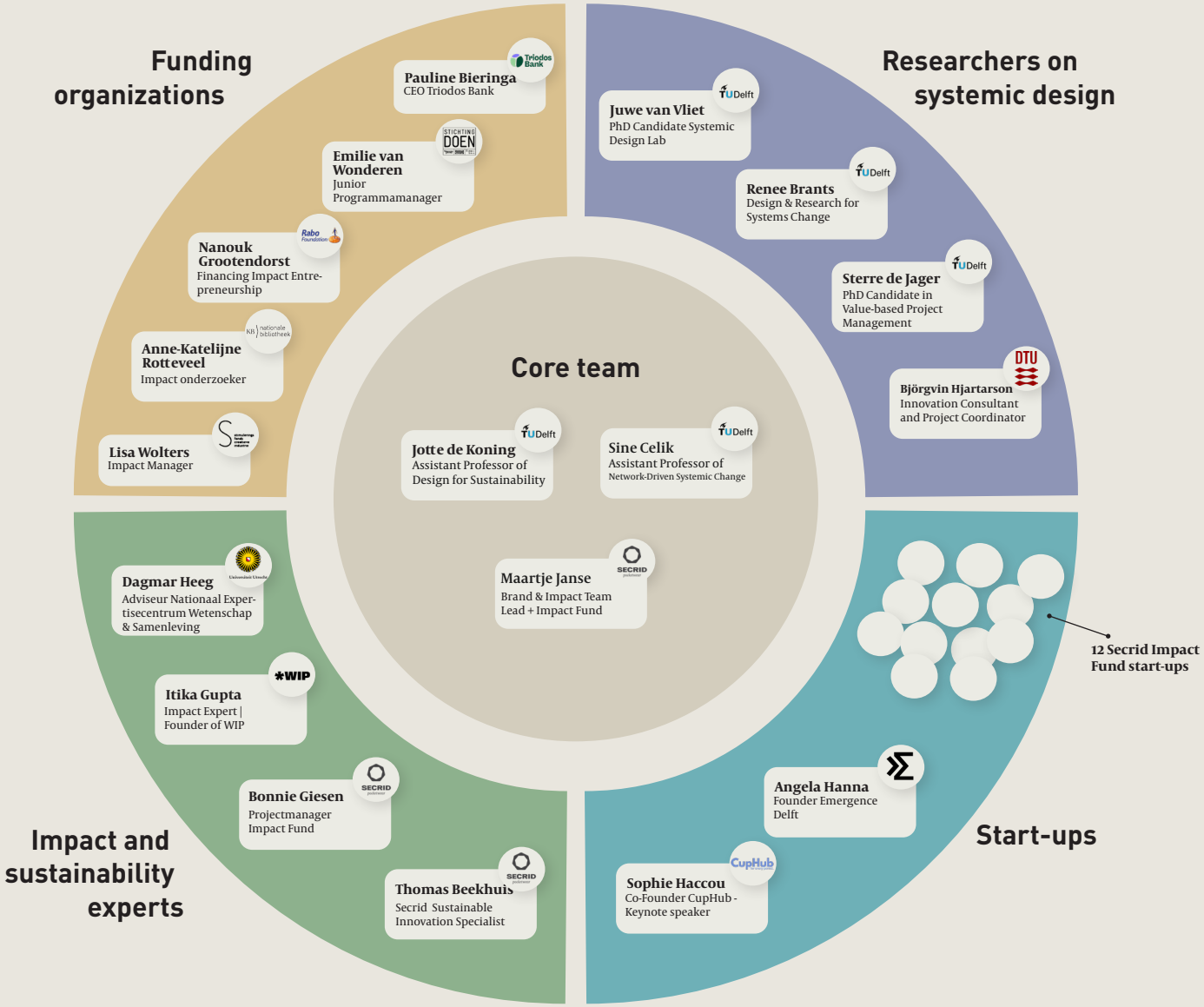



*Figure 6 Stakeholdermap project*

# II. RESEARCHING IMPACT

*This part explores impact from three angles: a systemic lens, an analysis of existing frameworks, and interviews with start-ups and the actors that fund them. Together they reveal where current impact tools fall short, framing the design challenge that follows.*


05 Understanding impact

06 Analysis of existing impact frameworks

07 Exploratory research


**Phase of chapter**
*Discover + Define*

# 05 Understanding impact

**The word impact runs through the entire context of the Secrid Impact Fund and the start-ups it supports, yet it is far from a settled concept. Different actors define it differently, and the way it is framed has direct consequences for what is measured, what is communicated, and which tools are built around it. Before existing frameworks can be analysed in Chapter 6 or design directions developed, it is therefore necessary to clarify what impact actually means in the context of this project.**

## 5.1 What is impact?

### 5.1.1 Impact and value

Impact refers to the long-term - positive or negative effects - that an action, system, organisation, or product has on environmental, social, and economic systems. It goes beyond immediate outputs by including intended and unintended, as well as direct and indirect, consequences (Brandts, 2025).

Yet, before impact comes value. Values can be understood as deeply held principles that shape behaviour, decision-making, and priorities. They reflect what individuals, groups, or organisations consider desirable and meaningful, thereby influencing their goals and actions. Whether personal, cultural, or organisational, values provide a normative foundation for identity and ethical conduct. In this sense, they function as a guiding compass, shaping both what is pursued and the kind of impact individuals or organisations aim to achieve (Schwartz, 1992). Impact, then, can be seen as the practical expression of these underlying values: core values shape principles, principles inform action, and these actions are ultimately reflected in social outcomes (Vanclay, 2003).

To ground these definitions in the perspective of the start-ups themselves, a brief Mentimeter exercise was conducted with the 2026 cohort of the Secrid Impact Fund at the start of a presentation. The participants were asked: What do you think of when talking about impact? Their responses, summarised in the word cloud below (Figure 7), show that the start-ups associate impact primarily with broad, system-level change. A better world dominated the cloud, surrounded by terms such as systemic change, long-term effect on society, regenerative cities, life changing, and positive effect on society. Sustainability oriented terms such as sustainable and people and planet appeared frequently as well. What is striking is that these associations align more closely with the systemic and transformative framing developed later in this chapter (Section 5.2) than with the narrower, output-oriented definitions that dominate many impact frameworks. Even before any formal measurement is introduced, these ventures already frame their own impact in terms of broader societal change.

What do you think of when talking about impact?

*Figure 7 - Mentimeter answers start-up Secrid Impact fund 2026*

### 5.1.2 Sustainablility and social impact

Sustainable and social impact are closely related, but they emphasise different dimensions of change. Sustainable impact usually refers to the broader long-term effects that activities, products, or organisations have on environmental, social, and economic systems. In other words, it concerns whether a contribution supports development that is environmentally sound, socially just, and viable over time. Social impact focuses more specifically on the effects on people, communities, wellbeing, inclusion, equity, and quality of life. (OECD, 2010) In practice, however, these dimensions are often unevenly rep-

resented. Environmental impact is more frequently translated into measurable indicators such as carbon emissions, energy use, or material flows, while social impact is often harder to capture because it includes more contextual and qualitative changes such as trust, empowerment, belonging, behaviour, or lived experience.

### 5.1.3 Impact monitoring

Impact monitoring is the ongoing process of systematically collecting and reviewing information about activities, outputs, outcomes, and emerging effects in order to understand whether an initiative is moving toward its intended impact. (Brandts, 2025) Unlike one-off evaluation, monitoring is continuous and supports reflection during the process rather than only at the end. In the literature, monitoring is often linked to a theory of change: a causal logic that explains how activities are expected to contribute to a chain of results and eventually to broader impact. (Belcher et al., n.d.)

Within impact monitoring, a distinction can be made between quantitative, qualitative, and hybrid approaches. Quantitative monitoring focuses on numerical indicators, targets, and measurable outputs, while qualitative monitoring captures experiences, meanings, mechanisms, and contextual change through stories, observations, interviews, or reflective accounts. There is also mixed or hybrid approaches are preferable, because they make it possible not only to determine the extent of change, but also to understand how, why, and under what conditions that change occurs. (Walker et al., 2024)

### 5.1.4 Impact communication

Impact communication is the process of making impact understandable and meaningful for others. It involves translating evidence, observations, and insights into forms that are relevant for different stakeholders, such as investors, partners, customers, communities, or policy actors. In that sense, impact communication is not simply the sharing of data, but the framing of impact in a way that is credible, transparent, and connected to stakeholder concerns. Sustainability reporting is one of the most common ways organisations communicate their societal and environmental impacts, which is a report where you share all your impact. (Moretti et al., 2025)

## 5.2 Impact through a systemic lens

Today, it is no longer possible to view design, innovation, or entrepreneurship as isolated from the wider systems in which they operate. Issues such as the energy transition, housing shortages, social inequality, and biodiversity loss can no longer be approached as merely technical, spatial, or social challenges. They involve all of these dimensions at once, and they unfold within networks of actors, institutions, materials, and meanings that extend far beyond the reach of any single organisation. (Goudswaard & Van Oosten, 2022)

Before impact can be meaningfully understood, the system in which that impact takes shape needs to be recognised. This section develops that systemic perspective.

### 5.2.1 Wicked problems and the case for a systemic approach

Contemporary societal challenges are open, interconnected, dynamic, and complex. They are commonly framed as wicked problems: problems that cannot be clearly bounded, that can

not be overseen by a single actor, and that cannot be solved by one organisation alone (Goudswaard & Van Oosten, 2022). Change therefore inevitably requires collaboration across multiple actors and domains. This makes a systemic approach essential. If contemporary challenges are wicked by nature, impact cannot be understood as the isolated outcome of one product, organisation, or intervention. Instead, it must be seen as something that emerges through interactions within a broader system of relationships, dependencies, and structures (Silvestri et al., 2021). Everything that is designed or developed becomes part of a larger social, economic, political, and ecological system. A systemic approach is therefore not an optional perspective, but a precondition for meaningfully understanding impact in a complex world.

### 5.2.2 What is systemic design?

If impact is to be understood systemically, it helps to consider how design itself relates to systems. Systemic design has emerged as a plural field that combines systems thinking and design in order to respond to complex societal challenges (Van der Bijl-Brouwer, 2023). Within this field, different practices differ in what is being designed, how the system is understood, and what the intention of the intervention is. Van der Bijl-Brouwer (2023) distinguishes between systems design, system-conscious design, and system-shifting design. Whereas system-conscious design focuses on developing products or services without creating harmful systemic effects, system-shifting design has a more ambitious intention: it aims to deliberately help move a system in a desired direction (see Figure 8).

This distinction matters for the way impact is approached in this project. The start-ups supported by the Secrid Impact Fund do not seek to make an existing product slightly better or more efficient. Rather, they often challenge dominant material choices, production logics, consumption patterns, or value chains. Throughout this thesis, system-shifting design is therefore taken as the perspective from which the work of these start-ups, and the impact they aim to create, is understood.

### 5.2.3 The start-ups as system-shifting actors

When the start-ups of the Secrid Impact Fund are referred to as mission-driven, the term carries a specific meaning. Mission-oriented innovation focuses on a shared societal direction rather than on isolated problem-solving (see figure 9). Traditional innovation is often problem-oriented, competitive, and concentrated in a limited number of projects, while mission-oriented innovation starts from a desired future and works through a broader portfolio of efforts, cooperation, and coordination (Berg, 2024). This makes it especially relevant for complex societal challenges, where no single actor or innovation can create change alone. The start-ups within the Secrid Impact Fund fit this profile. Many of them are not only developing individual products, but contributing to broader tran-

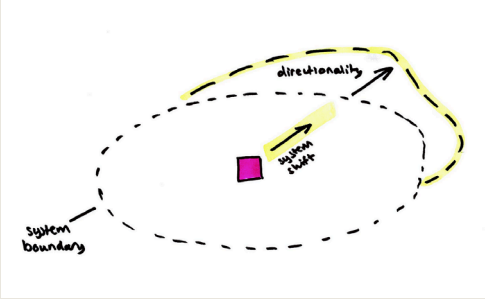



*Figure 8 System shifting design (Van Der Bijl-Brouwer,2023)*

| Traditional innovation | Mission-oriented innovation |
|---|---|
| **Problem-oriented** | **Opportunity oriented** |
| Developing for the future based on the current understanding of the problem | We position ourselves in the future and establish an image of what we dream of |
| Focus on a few large-scale projects to remedy the problem | Focus on the broad spectrum and portfolio of different efforts that together, in combination, affect the problem |
| Competing about funding and resources | Cooperation on funding and resources |
| Top-down OR bottom-up | Top-down AND bottom-up |
| Governance is an expense | Governance is an investment |

*Figure 9 Traditional innovation vs. mission-oriented innovation – inspired by Mariana Mazzucato (Berg, 2024)*

sitions in materials, production, and value chains. They can therefore be understood as part of a mission-oriented innovation landscape: future-oriented, collaborative, and working toward wider societal goals such as circularity, regenerative production, and alternative material systems.

To position these start-ups within a systemic transition, the X-curve provides a useful frame (see Figure 10). The X-curve is a transition model that helps to understand systemic change as the interaction between two movements: the build-up of the new and the phase-out of the old (Silvestri et al., 2021). On the one hand, new ideas, practices, and alternatives begin to emerge in niches through experimentation and small-scale initiatives. On the other hand, existing systems, structures, and routines may stabilise, become contested, and gradually decline. A transition therefore does not only ask how the new can grow, but also how the old is being challenged, destabilised, or replaced.

This framework is especially useful for impact-driven start-ups. Their contribution does not necessarily lie in scale alone, but in the transition role they play: experimenting with alternatives, connecting actors, challenging dominant practices, or helping new approaches gain traction.

For the Secrid Impact Fund, this is particularly relevant because many of the start-ups are still in early or mid-stage phases. They are best understood as niche experiments or emerging alternatives rather than as fully established solutions. Their value therefore lies not only in what they already deliver at scale, but also in how they contribute to wider transition processes.
Dungse Lab is a strong example of a Secrid start-up in the emerging phase of the X-curve, visualized in Figure 11. The venture responds to a dominant construction and materials

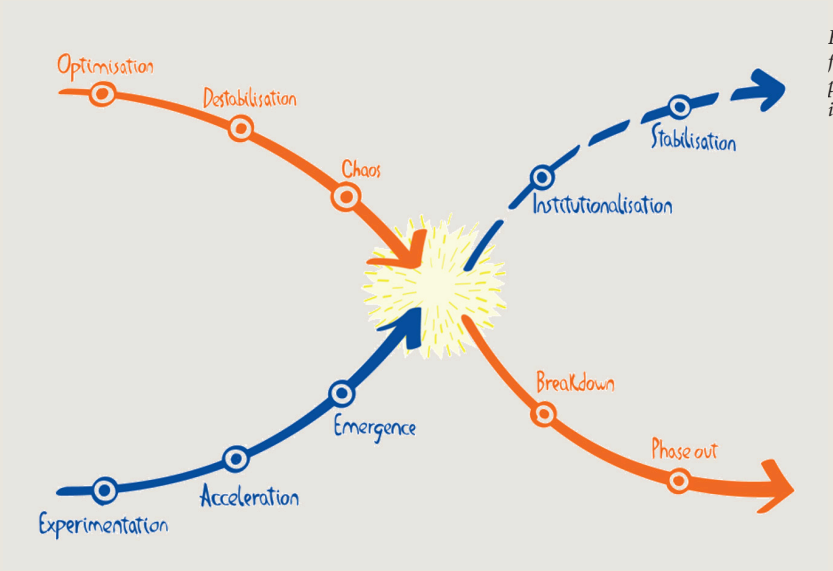



*Figure 10 The X-curve for transitioning with positioning of Secrid impact fund start-ups*

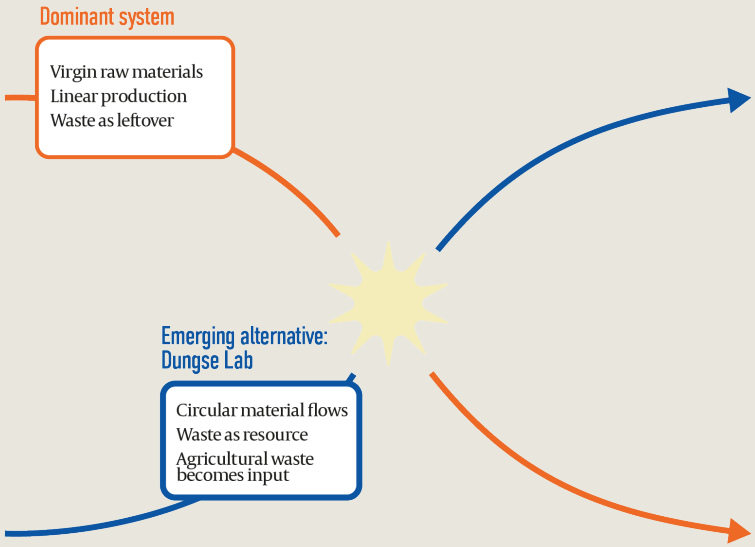



*Figure 11 Dungle Labs from innovation to system leven change*

system that is largely linear and extractive, in which building materials depend on virgin resources and agricultural waste such as cow manure is treated as a residual problem rather than a valuable resource. By transforming cow manure into building materials and bioplastics, Dungse Lab does not simply improve an existing product, but experiments with a different material system (see Figure 8). In this alternative logic, waste becomes input, sectors become more connected, and value is created through circular resource use. Its contribution to systemic change therefore lies not only in the products themselves, but also in making a new material future visible and testable.

### 5.2.4 How systemic designers work: four core practices

If the start-ups of the Secrid Impact Fund act as system-shifting actors, the question becomes how systemic designers actually work. The Delft Systemic Design Lab (D-SDL) articulates four interrelated practices that shape its approach (see Figure 12): framing complexity, meaningful formgiving, building relations, and nurturing reflexivity. Framing and formgiving form the central activities, while relations and reflexivity create the conditions that make systemic engagement possible (Goss et al., 2026).

Framing complexity is the iterative practice of making sense of patterns, relationships, and leverage points in a system, and using that understanding to open up new problem framings and intervention strategies. Meaningful formgiving gives shape to those interventions, both processually, through visual and narrative tools such as gigamaps, causal-loop diagrams, and scenarios, and through tangible artefacts, services, or stories that mobilise actors toward change. Building relations extends beyond stakeholder engagement to include the institutional, cultural, and material relations that shape how change unfolds. Nurturing reflexivity, finally, keeps designers attentive to their own assumptions, values, and position throughout the process, enabling boundary critique as conditions evolve (Goss et al., 2026).

Two additional concepts deepen this picture. An entry point to the system names where a designer or actor enters the system, a choice that shapes which actors are engaged, which relations are built, and which framings become possible (Van der Bijl-Brouwer, 2023). A ripple effect describes how a targeted local intervention extends outward through new connections, shifts in practices, and chains of unintended consequences (Nobles et al., 2022). Together, they make explicit that systemic impact depends less on the scale of an intervention than on where it intervenes and how its effects propagate.

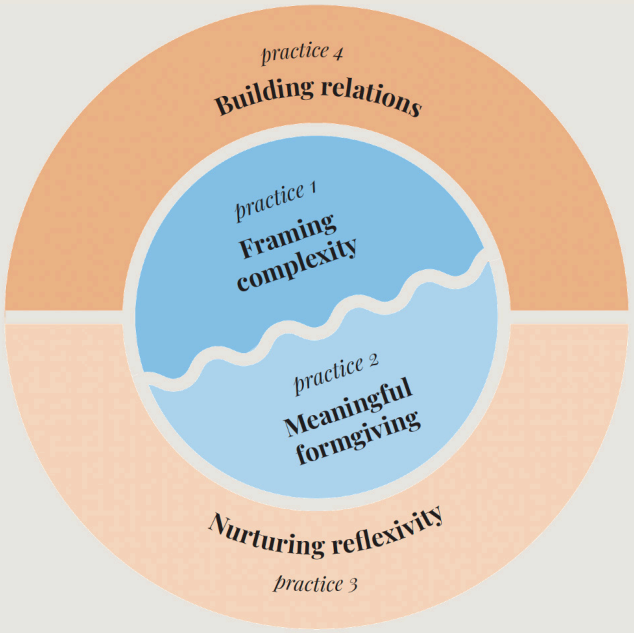



*Figure 12 - Four core practices of the Delft Systemic Design Lab (Goss et al., 2026)*

### 5.2.5 Where systemic change happens: leverage points and relational transformations

Recognising that impact emerges from within a system raises the question of where, exactly, meaningful influence in a system can take place. Donella Meadows addresses this through the concept of leverage points (Figure 13): places within a complex system where a relatively small shift can lead to larger changes (Meadows, 1999). She distinguishes between different kinds of interventions, ranging from relatively shallow ones, such as changing numbers, parameters, or material stocks, to deeper ones, such as changing information flows, rules, goals, and ultimately the underlying mindset or paradigm out of which a system arises. Although the deeper leverage points are the most transformative, they are also the least visible, the most difficult to measure, and the hardest to intentionally influence (Vervoort et al., 2025).

West et al. (2024) build on this recognition by introducing a relational turn within sustainability transformations. They argue that transformations to sustainability are not only structural or technical processes, but unfold through the relationships between human and non-human beings, between knowledge systems, and between actors situated in different worlds. Their review identifies five intersecting relational approaches (Indigenous-kinship, systemic-analytical, posthumanist-performative, structural-metabolic, and Latin American-postdevelopment) and shows how each approach contributes differently to a set of key concepts in transformations research and practice: human-nature interconnectedness, agency and leadership, scale and scaling, time and change, and knowledge and action (West et al., 2024).

Taken together, Meadows and West et al. reveal that the most consequential places to influence a system are typically not the parameters and outputs that are easiest to count. They are the deeper, relational, and paradigmatic layers through which a system holds itself together, and through which it can shift. For the start-ups of the Secrid Impact Fund, this perspective implies that their work cannot be fully understood through the indicators with which organisational performance is conventionally measured. Their contribution to systemic change unfolds in different registers, which the next section draws out as key insights for this project.

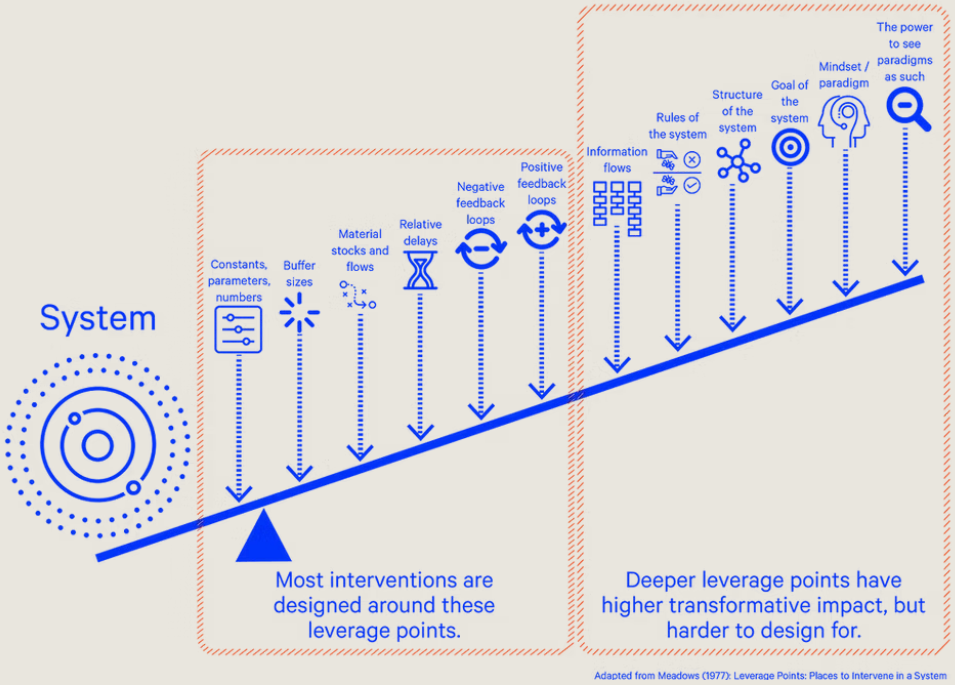



*Figure 13 Meadows' leverage points - places to intervene in a system. (Meadows, 1999)*

## 5.3 Key insights from literature research

Three key insights emerge from this systemic perspective.

First, the start-ups of the Secrid Impact Fund can be understood as inherently mission-driven and system-shifting in nature. Their ambition is not limited to improving a single product or service, but is directed toward broader societal transitions, such as circularity, regenerative production, and alternative value chains. Their work and their intended impact must therefore be understood in systemic terms, as a contribution to wider transitions rather than as the isolated output of a single organisation.

Second, the four core practices of systemic design (Goss et al., 2026) are already, in part, present in the work of these start-ups, even when they are not named as such. Framing complexity, meaningful formgiving, building relations, and nurturing reflexivity are not the exclusive domain of academically trained systemic designers; they describe activities that mission-driven entrepreneurs already engage in when they reframe problems, develop stories and prototypes, build coalitions, and reflect on their own position. Making these practices visible, and giving the start-ups language and tools to recognize and sharpen them, is therefore a central opportunity of this project, and an important way to support their development as system-shifters.

Third, the impact of system-shifting start-ups cannot be captured by conventional indicators alone. When impact is approached through Meadows' deeper leverage points and the relational dimensions identified by West et al. (2024), it becomes clear that conventional impact monitoring tends to remain at the level of parameters and outputs. What actually takes place in the work of these start-ups is more often visible in the ripple effects that extend through newly built relations (Nobles et al., 2022), in shifts in system roles and entry points, in the growing agency of actors within the network, and in the ongoing reflexivity through which the start-ups reconsider their own framings and assumptions. These elements form the vocabulary that conventional impact monitoring currently lacks, and they provide the foundation on which the framework developed in the later chapters of this thesis is built.

# 06. Analysis of existing impact frameworks

**Where Chapter 5 introduced impact conceptually and developed the systemic lens through which it is approached in this thesis, this chapter turns to how impact is currently operationalised in practice. It examines the landscape of existing impact frameworks: the tools, methods, and standards through which organisations are expected to measure, monitor, and communicate their social and environmental impact.**

## 6.1 The current landscape of impact frameworks

A wide range of frameworks has been developed to measure, monitor, and communicate social and environmental impact. They differ strongly in purpose, scope, and the types of evidence they use: some focus on quantitative environmental assessment, while others help organisations define, manage, or communicate broader social and sustainability ambitions. The current landscape is therefore broad, but fragmented.

To better understand this landscape, a review was conducted of 25 impact frameworks widely used or referenced in practice and literature. The selection started from a broad pool of more than 140 tools shared by impact researcher Itika Gupta, complemented by frameworks identified through academic literature and additional papers, online desk research, conversations with LCA lecturers, input from the Utrecht University Impact Lab, and discussions with impact researcher Renée Brandts. The full analysis of all 25 frameworks is included in Appendix A.1. The result is Table 1 who show the different clusters of frameworks and their main purpose, user group and measurement indicators.

| Framework / cluster | Main purpose / underlying logic | Typical users | Measurement approach / indicators |
|---|---|---|---|
| **B Impact Assessment / B Corp** (B Lab Europe, 2024) | To assess the overall social and environmental performance of a company. | Companies, social enterprises, certified B Corps. | Key impact topics: purpose & stakeholder governance, fair work, JEDI (justice, Equity, diversity & inclusion), human rights, climate action, environmental stewardship & circularity, governance affairs & collective action. |
| **GIIN / IRIS+** (*GIIN Benchmarks*, n.d.) | To provide standardized impact metrics, especially for impact investing. | Impact investors, funds, portfolio companies, start-ups seeking investment. | Ex. Jobs created, customers reached, CO2 emissions avoided, beneficiaries served, income change, number of suppliers screened. |
| **UN SDG framework / SDG tools** (United Nations, n.d.) | To connect activities and outcomes to the Sustainable Development Goals. | Governments, NGOs, companies, start-ups, grant makers. | SDG-linked targets, access to services, gender equality, clean energy use, reduced inequalities, responsible production. |
| **ESG reporting: GRI / SASB** (*IFRS - Understanding SASB Standards*, n.d.) | To report sustainability performance at company level. | Corporates, larger companies, investors, reporting teams, scale-ups. | Emissions, energy use, water use, waste, worker health and safety, board diversity, supply chain practices. |
| **Climate disclosure: CDP / TCFD** (Kelo, 2026) (TCFD, 2022) | To report climate-related risks, strategy, and emissions. | Large companies, supply-chain actors, investors, financial institutions. | Scope 1 emissions, Scope 2 emissions, Scope 3 emissions, climate targets, transition plans, climate risks. |
| **LCA / ILCD** (Faludi et al., 2025) | To measure the environmental impact of a product or material across its life cycle. | Product designers, manufacturers, consultants, corporates, researchers. | Carbon footprint, water use, energy use, land use, toxicity, resource depletion, ecosystem impact. |
| **Theory of Change / Logic Model / Impact Back casting / IMP** (Belcher et al., n.d.) (Dreborg, 1996) | To structure how activities are expected to lead to outcomes and impact. | NGOs, social enterprises, start-ups, designers, policymakers, innovation teams. | Inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, impact, contribution, risk, affected stakeholders, scale of change. |
| **SROI (Social Return on Investment)** (Timmins et al., 2012) | To express social value in financial terms. | Social enterprises, NGOs, public projects, subsidy providers, investors. | Social value created, proxy values, deadweight, attribution, value per euro invested. |
| **Planetary Boundaries** (Richardson & Steffen, 2023) | To assess impact in relation to Earth's ecological limits. | Researchers, policymakers, sustainability strategists, mission-driven organizations | Climate change, biodiversity loss, freshwater use, land-system change, nitrogen flows, phosphorus flows. |
| **LiDS Wheel / EcoDesign Strategy Wheel** (Brezet & Van Hemel, 1997) | To identify opportunities for reducing the environmental impact of a product throughout its life cycle. | Product designers, design teams, consultants, manufacturers and design-driven start-ups. | New concept development, selection of low-impact materials, reduction of material use, optimization of production techniques, optimization of distribution, reduction of impact during use, optimization of product lifetime and optimization of the end-of-life system. |

*Table 1 Frameworks analysis overview with their difference in purpose, user and approach/indicators*

## 6.2 Comparing frameworks across four dimensions

The differences between the analysed frameworks go beyond target group or measurement topic alone. To better understand not only what they measure but how they function as tools for impact articulation and decision-making, two analyses were carried out. The first positions the frameworks within an Impact Logic Matrix that captures their underlying logic (Section 6.2.1). The second descends to the level of indicators, examining which quantitative metrics recur across them (Section 6.2.2). Two additional clustering perspectives were also developed during the analysis: evaluative versus generative and point-in-time versus process-oriented. These are included in Appendix A.2 to keep the chapter focused.

### 6.2.1 The Impact Logic Matrix

The Impact Logic Matrix positions the frameworks along two dimensions: the form of justification (horizontal) and the purpose of impact articulation (vertical). These axes were developed during the analysis to better understand what the frameworks are actually intended to do. Rather than comparing only their content, the matrix shows the logic behind their use (Figure 14).

The horizontal axis ranges from evidence-driven to narrative-oriented. Evidence-driven frameworks justify impact through metrics and analytical evidence, while narrative-oriented frameworks focus more on interpretation, framing, and explaining how change is understood. The vertical axis ranges from internal alignment to external legitimacy. Some frameworks mainly support internal reflection and strategic direction, while others are primarily used to build credibility toward external stakeholders.

After defining these dimensions, the frameworks were plotted on the matrix (Figure 15) to examine how they position them-

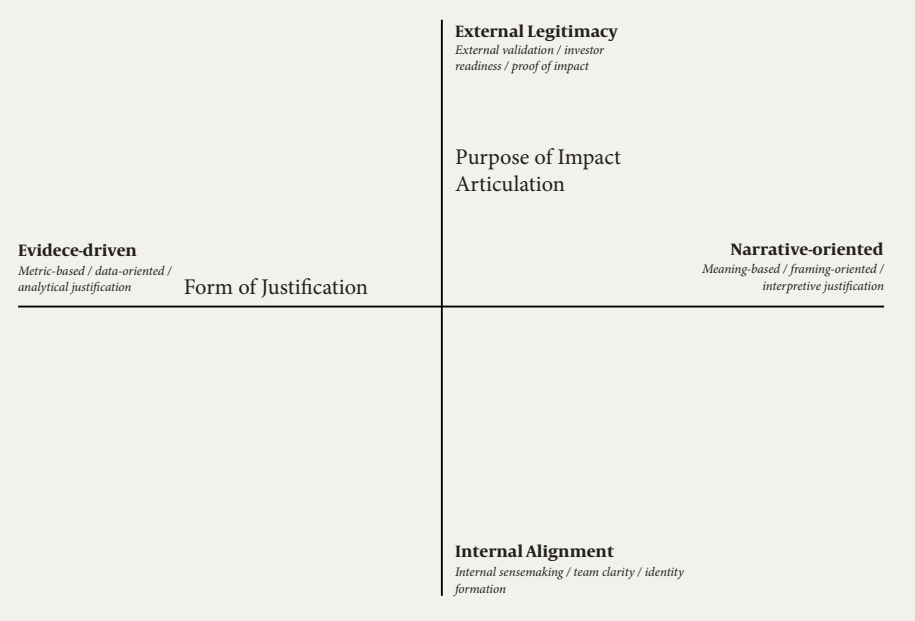



*Figure 14 Matrix of Impact Logic matrix*

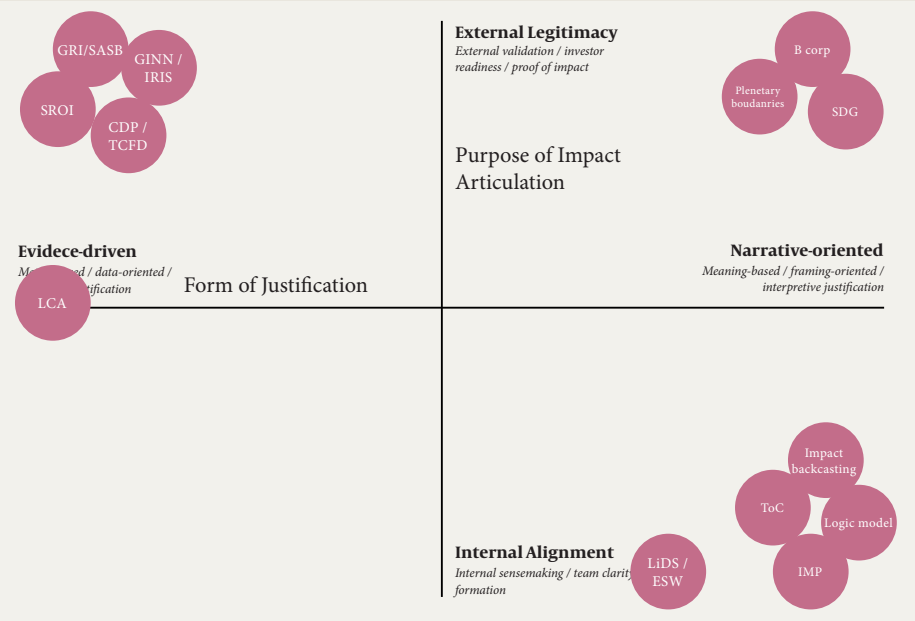



*Figure 15 Matrix of Impact Logic matrix*

selves in relation to one another. The comparison reveals that frameworks differ not only in what they measure, but also in the role they perform. LCA/ILCD, GIIN/IRIS+, GRI/SASB, and CDP/TCFD are positioned mainly on the evidence-driven and externally oriented side, as they are used for proof, comparability, and reporting. Theory of Change, Logic Model, Impact Backcasting, and IMP are more narrative-oriented and internally focused, helping organisations clarify assumptions, pathways, and intended change. B Impact Assessment, the SDGs, and Planetary Boundaries take a more hybrid position.

### 6.2.2 Recurring metrics across frameworks

To move from framework logic to framework content, the analysis examined recurring quantitative metrics across nine frameworks: ReCiPe, ILCD, SASB, GIIN/IRIS+, SROI, B Impact Assessment, CDP, GRI, and TCFD. This comparison helps to show which forms of impact are most consistently translated into measurable indicators across current frameworks.

A cross-framework inventory was created (Appendix A.3) in which similar metrics were grouped under shared categories, despite differences in wording or specificity between frameworks. The analysis did not compare exact calculation methods, but focused on recurrence: which types of indicators repeatedly appear across frameworks.

The comparison shows that the most recurring quantitative metrics are mainly environmental. Frequently appearing indicators relate to climate change, carbon footprint, biodiversity, emissions, land use, water, and energy (Table 2). Social metrics appear less consistently and are more mixed in nature; the most recurring examples include training and skills development, governance-related indicators, community engagement, and workforce size (Table 3).

| Metrics number | Combined metric | Meaning of the metrics | Type | Unit / typical units | # frameworks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E-001 | Climate change / carbon footprint | Measures total climate impact or greenhouse-gas burden. | Quantitative | tCO2e / kg CO2e / yr per kg CO2 | 8 |
| E-002 | Biodiversity / habitat impact or restoration | Effect on species, habitats, ecosystems or restoration outcomes. | Hybrid | ha / number of sites / species / n.v.t. | 7 |
| E-003 | Emissions reduced / avoided | Emissions prevented, reduced or avoided versus a baseline. | Quantitative | tCO2e avoided or reduced | 7 |
| E-004 | Land use / land transformation | Area occupied, transformed or managed, and related ecosystem impact. | Quantitative | m2a crop eq / ha / m2·year | 7 |
| E-005 | Water consumption | Net water consumed and not returned to the same catchment. | Quantitative | m3 / ML / yr per m3 water | 6 |
| E-006 | Water pollutant emissions (N / P / COD / toxics) | Polluting releases to water bodies including nutrients and toxic substances. | Quantitative | kg / tons / kg N eq / kg P eq | 6 |

*Tabel 2 Top counted metrics in environmental scope*

| Metrics number | Combined metric | Meaning of the metrics | Type | Unit / typical units | # frameworks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S-018 | Training hours / skills development | Learning, skilling or capacity-building provided to workers or beneficiaries. | Quantitative | hours / participants / % trained | 5 |
| S-026 | Community engagement / impact assessments | How far the company engages communities and performs social impact assessments. | Quantitative & qualitative | % operations / number / n.v.t. | 4 |
| S-027 | Employees / FTE | Workforce size in headcount or full-time equivalents. | Quantitative | headcount / FTE | 4 |
| S-034 | Access to essential services | Improved access to healthcare, housing, finance, education, energy, water or transport. | Quantitative | number of beneficiaries / % access | 3 |

*Tabel 3 Top counted metrics in social scope*

## 6.3 Key insights from the framework analysis

Taken together, the comparison of framework logics and recurring metrics leads to four insights into the structure of the current impact-measurement landscape.

**1. Impact frameworks do not only measure impact differently, they define it differently**
The analyzed frameworks reflect different assumptions about what impact is and how it should be made visible. Some approach impact as something that can be verified through quantified evidence, while others treat it as something that must first be articulated, interpreted, and developed. Frameworks therefore do not function as neutral measurement tools, but actively shape how impact is understood.

**2. The key challenge is not the lack of frameworks, but the mismatch between framework and purpose**
The frameworks are not interchangeable, because they were designed for different goals: measurement, reporting, sense-making, accountability, or strategic direction. Tensions arise when one framework is expected to serve all these purposes at once. For start-ups especially, the challenge is often not to find the "best" framework, but to find an approach that fits their stage of development, stakeholder context, and intended use.

**3. Current frameworks make some forms of impact far more visible than others**
The recurring metrics show that environmental indicators such as emissions, energy, water, and material use are more standardized and repeatedly formalized across frameworks. Social impact, by contrast, is less consistently captured and often translated into proxy indicators such as training, governance, or reach. This suggests that current frameworks favour forms of impact that are easier to quantify, compare, and report, while more complex forms of social and systemic change remain less visible.

**4. Existing public frameworks leave a gap for early-stage, system-shifting start-ups**
Many publicly available frameworks are strongest at either external legitimacy or internal reflection, but fewer combine both effectively. This is especially relevant for start-ups in the Secrid Impact Fund, whose impact is often still emerging and whose value may lie as much in experimentation, transition positioning, and system influence as in measurable outputs. Existing frameworks may therefore be useful in parts but often do not fully match the needs of early-stage ventures working on broader systemic change.

# 07. Exploratory research

**Where Chapter 5 introduced impact as a theoretical and methodological field, and Chapter 6 analysed how existing frameworks structure, measure, and communicate it, this chapter explores how the start-ups within and around the Secrid Impact Fund, together with the actors that support and fund them, actually experience impact measurement and communication in practice.**

## 7.1 Approach

The exploratory research investigated how mission-driven start-ups of the Secrid Impact Fund and the actors that support and fund them experience impact measurement in practice.

### 7.1.1 Participants and sampling

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted: five with founders of former Secrid-supported start-ups, and three with ecosystem actors (Secrid, Stichting DOEN, and the impact-first venture studio WIP), together offering complementary venture-side and support-side perspectives (Figure 16). Sampling was pragmatic: start-ups were selected based on availability, while ecosystem actors were approached through Secrid's network. Although this limits representativeness, the sample covers diverse impact domains, venture stages, and ecosystem roles. Start-ups are anonymised as Start-up A–E based on their dominant domain, impact focus, and stage of development (Table 4).

*Figure 16 - Interviewed participants*

| Start up | Impact focus | Domain | Stage of development |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | Environmental and social focus | Circular production | Early market stage |
| B | Environmental focus | Low-carbon materials | Prototype-validation stage |
| C | Environmental focus | Bio-based materials | Growth stage |
| D | Environmental and social focus | Built-environment innovation | Prototype-validation stage |
| E | Social focus | Social and inclusive design | Early market stage |

*Tabel 4 Start-up compararitive overview*

### 7.1.2 Data collection

Interviews were conducted via Zoom and lasted 30 to 60 minutes. A semi-structured format kept conversations open enough to follow each participant's framing of impact, while ensuring the four exploratory questions were covered consistently. The interview protocols are included in Appendix A.4.

### 7.1.3 Data Analysis

Interview responses and observations were analysed thematically, looking for recurring patterns and underlying values that formed the main insights. An AI tool (Claude, by Anthropic) was used in parallel to surface initial codes; AI-generated patterns were validated through manual clustering in Miro before being adopted as themes.

### 7.1.4 Limitations

A small sample size (n = 8) of participants is used, constrains generalisability; and the combined AI-assisted and manual analysis introduces both opportunities and risks, mitigated through manual validation. The findings are therefore intended as a basis for sharpening the design direction, not as conclusive evidence.

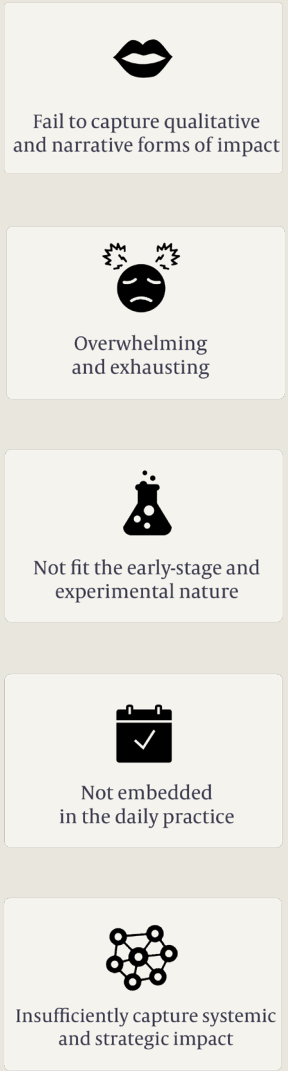



*Figure 17 Overview of findings frameworks limitations*

## 7.2 Where existing impact frameworks fall short

When start-ups are asked to demonstrate their impact, they typically turn to established frameworks such as Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) for sustainability claims, and in some cases Social Return on Investment (SROI) for socially oriented work. These frameworks recurred across the interviews, but so did the friction points that emerge when applying them. The same question was discussed with Secrid, Stichting DOEN, and WIP, who reflected on the barriers they observe in the start-ups they support. Five overarching limitations emerge from the combined accounts (Figure 17).

### 7.2.1 Failing to capture qualitative and narrative impact

Start-ups struggle to express effects such as pride, meaningful work, awareness, or behavioural change through standard frameworks, which prioritise what can be counted over what is felt or contextual. Start-up A found valuable qualitative effects hard to measure; Start-up E pointed out that social impact is particularly hard to quantify in an early phase; Start-up D noted the difficulty of holding on to the larger narrative across communication moments.

### 7.2.2 Overwhelming and exhausting

Frameworks such as LCA were described as technical, time-consuming, and dependent on data that early-stage ventures often do not yet possess. Start-up D experienced quantitative frameworks as complex and overwhelming, while Start-up E reported feeling exhausted and at times hopeless when confronted with them. Setyaningsih, Widjojo, and Kelle (2024) identify six categories of barriers to sustainability reporting in SMEs (financial, knowledge and technology, organisational, and policy-related), making existing reporting approaches difficult to adopt for ventures with limited resources.

### 7.2.3 Not fit for the early-stage and experimental nature

The structural reason behind this friction is that most established frameworks assume stable products, clear data, and organisational maturity that early-stage start-ups have not yet developed. This mismatch is supported by the literature: Kumar et al. (2025) show that LCA is particularly difficult to apply in early design phases, because material choices and quantities are often still unknown and many designers lack the expertise to conduct LCA analyses themselves, leaving experimental ventures without methods that genuinely match their phase of development.

### 7.2.4 Not embedded in the daily practice

Interviewees described impact measurement as something often done for external accountability (subsidies, reports, investors), rather than as part of everyday decision-making. This limits its value as a tool for learning, reflection, and strategic direction. WIP made this explicit: frameworks should not be something start-ups “pull out” for accountability moments, but something embedded in the DNA of the venture. Setyaningsih et al. (2024) frame the same dynamic structurally: reporting is burdensome precisely because it is treated as a separate task rather than a steering mechanism.

### 7.2.5 Insufficiently capture systemic and strategic impact

Several respondents noted that their ventures aim to contribute to broader system change, a form of impact difficult to capture in linear, standardised frameworks that often miss uncertainty, long-term change, and strategic sensitivities. Secrid argued that what matters for these ventures is often not the quantified impact itself, but the core problem they address and the system difference they seek to create. Current frameworks therefore not only underrepresent emergent and systemic impact, but may also pressure start-ups into disclosures that do not match their strategic reality.

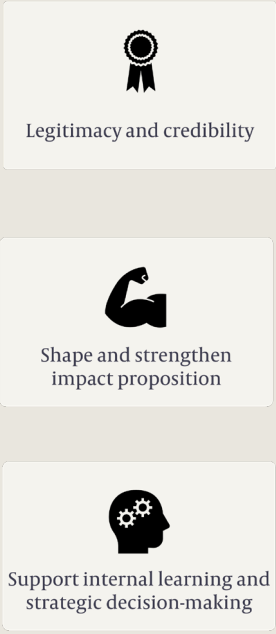



*Figure 18 Overview of key findings of the reasons why to communicate and measure impact*

## 7.3 Why start-ups measure and communicate impact

Start-ups do not measure and communicate impact from a neutral wish to know more. In practice, impact measurement is driven by external pressure, positioning, and the need to explain why a venture matters, especially in early stages, where ventures are still developing their product, mission, and market position while already being asked to demonstrate social or environmental value. Across the interviews, three purposes emerged, ranging from outward-facing to inward-facing: building legitimacy and credibility, sharpening the impact proposition, and supporting internal learning and decision-making (Figure 18).

### 7.3.1 Building legitimacy and credibility

The most visible reason is to build legitimacy toward external stakeholders. Start-ups are expected to demonstrate that their product or service creates real environmental or social value in order to be taken seriously by investors, funders, partners, municipalities, and clients. Start-up B mainly used LCA because external stakeholders required evidence of material performance; Start-up C used impact measurement to substantiate sustainability claims toward brands and certifiers; Start-up D relied on impact information to enter discussions in the construction sector on more equal terms. Across these cases, impact measurement functioned primarily as a credibility instrument.

### 7.3.2 Sharpening the impact proposition

A second purpose is articulation. Many ventures do not begin with a clearly formulated mission or impact framework, but with a material, a design idea, a technology, or a personal motivation. Only later does the question arise of what kind of change they want to create and how to communicate it. This dynamic was particularly visible in Secrid's mentoring conversations:

*"With some start-ups it takes us a lot of time to understand the impact story of the start-up and articulate it with them." — Secrid*

Start-up D illustrated the same shift: storytelling played an important role, but became more convincing when supported by concrete evidence. In this register, impact measurement is not only proof but also clarification, a way to find and sharpen what the venture is actually claiming.

### 7.3.3 Supporting internal learning and decision-making

The third purpose was articulated least explicitly by the start-ups themselves but most strongly by WIP: impact measurement is not only retrospective accountability, but also an ongoing source of insight during development. Start-up A linked impact measurement to tracking progress before formal reporting moments; Start-up D and Start-up E used impact-related information to support development, positioning, and learning. From this perspective, impact measurement can help start-ups make more informed decisions while their strategy is still evolving, a use that ventures often grow into rather than start with.

## 7.4 When impact becomes urgent: key moments in the start-up journey

Impact measurement can be ongoing, but its urgency spikes at specific moments in a venture's development. These are the moments when ventures must make their impact explicit, credible, or actionable, and they shape what a future impact tool needs to offer. Across the interviews, five recurring moments emerged (Figure 19).

### 7.4.1 The first mentor conversation with Secrid

The first mentoring conversation with Secrid is an early but important moment, where ventures are asked to explain what impact they aim to create and why it matters. Even without formal measurement, this requires founders to articulate their intended value. Start-up B described this conversation as a turning point that helped move their impact focus from intuition to articulation.

### 7.4.2 Applying for subsidies or funding

Funding applications are a major trigger. Start-ups are often asked to support their claims with evidence, projections, or indicators, even while still in an experimental stage. This creates a recurring tension: ventures need funding to develop their impact, but they also need to demonstrate impact to access funding. Early-stage start-ups, with limited revenue and internal resources, are particularly exposed to this dynamic.

### 7.4.3 Entering a partnership

When start-ups enter collaborations with larger partners, commissioners, or sector actors, impact information builds trust and signals that the venture can meet professional expectations. Start-up C needed sustainability proof and certification-related evidence before partnerships would consider engaging.

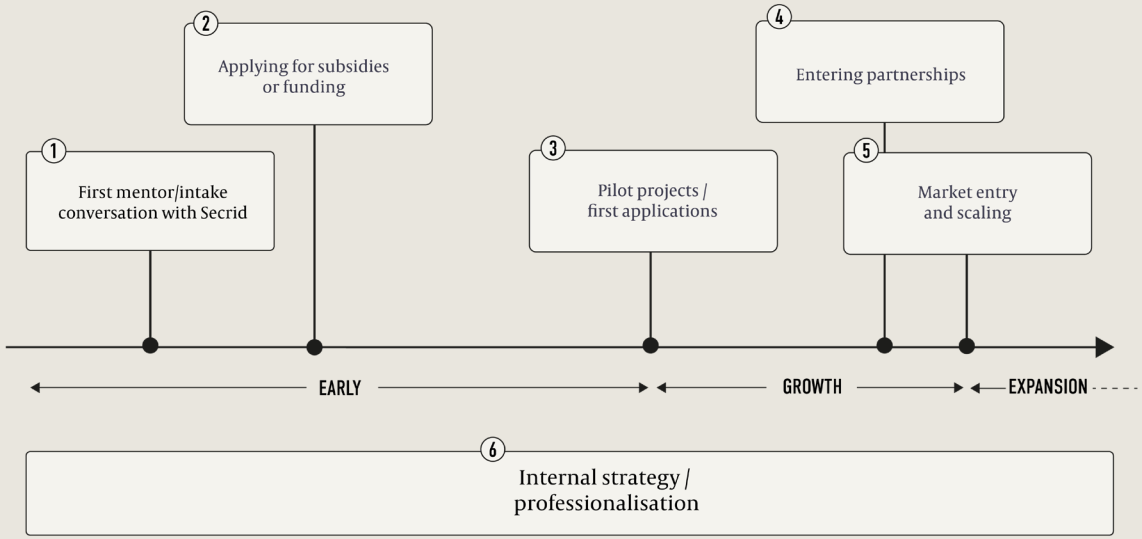



*Figure 19 Key moments line of the start-up journey*

### 7.4.4 Pilots, market entry, and scaling

As ventures move from experimentation toward broader adoption (through pilots, real-world applications, market entry, or scaling), impact claims come under greater scrutiny. Stronger and more formalised evidence is needed to support statements about sustainability and social value. The challenge here is twofold: producing more robust evidence than in the early phase, and making early effects from pilots visible and communicable to wider audiences.

### 7.4.5 Internal strategy and professionalisation

A final moment is internal reflection and strategic development. Here impact is used less for external proof and more for understanding progress, making decisions, and identifying where value is being created. WIP emphasised this dimension most strongly, framing impact as a tool for learning and direction-setting rather than disclosure.

Taken together, these findings show that the need to measure or communicate impact is both stage- and event-dependent: different moments call for different forms of impact articulation, sometimes formal evidence, sometimes a clear narrative, sometimes internal reflection. Both Secrid and WIP stressed, however, that impact should ideally not surface only at high-pressure moments but become embedded in the everyday practice of the venture.

## 7.5 Who start-ups communicate to: stakeholders and their information needs

The impact story of start-ups is always shaped in relation to actors who fund, support, evaluate, collaborate with, or buy from them, and different actors expect different kinds of information. Based on the interviews, five stakeholder groups emerged (Figure 20). These categories can overlap, but distinguishing between them helps clarify the diverse expectations that shape start-up impact communication.

### 7.5.1 Support actors

Support actors such as Secrid and WIP focus less on formal accountability and more on how a venture develops over time. They want to see whether a start-up has a clear mission, shows learning capacity, and is becoming better able to articulate and strengthen its impact logic. For these actors, communication is not only about outcomes but also about reflection, progress, and developmental potential.

### 7.5.2 Financial actors

Financial actors (grant providers, public funding bodies, investors, and mission-driven funders) look primarily for credibility, accountability, and evidence that the start-up's impact claims are meaningful and not empty. In practice this translates into a very different approach involving KPIs, output indicators, sustainability data, or evidence that the

| | Support actors | Financial actors | Professional partners | Internal stakeholders | Consumers and broader publics |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| What do they want to know / hear? | What is the intended impact?<br>Why does this venture matter?<br>Is the impact story becoming clearer? | Is the impact claim credible?<br>Is there proof or early validation?<br>Is this worth supporting? | Does it work in practice?<br>Is it reliable, feasible, and relevant for our context? | What is working?<br>Where is value being created?<br>What should we improve or prioritise? | What is the impact? Why does it matter?<br>Why is this different from conventional alternatives? |
| What kind of impact evidence is needed? | Clear impact narrative, mission clarity, early logic of change, signs of reflection and development | KPIs, projected outcomes, simple metrics, early validation, milestones, measurable logic | Technical proof, sustainability proof, certification-related evidence, comparability, operational fit | Reflection, progress tracking, shared language, directional indicators, learning insights | Accessible storytelling, visual proof, simple claims, understandable public-facing communication |
| What does the start-up get in return? | Mentoring, selection, feedback, visibility, access to network | Funding, legitimacy, access to programmes, growth opportunities | Partnerships, contracts, trust, implementation opportunities | Strategic clarity, focus, motivation, alignment, decision support | Trust, visibility, engagement, market recognition |
| Example | Secrid, WIP | DOEN, RVO, Stimuleringsfonds | Larger brands or production partners | Founders and team members | Consumer on website, visitor of DDW, media audience |

*Figure 20 Overview stakeholders start-ups impact story*

venture can become self-sustaining over time. Their questions are shaped not only by their own interests but also by the wider accountability structures behind them.

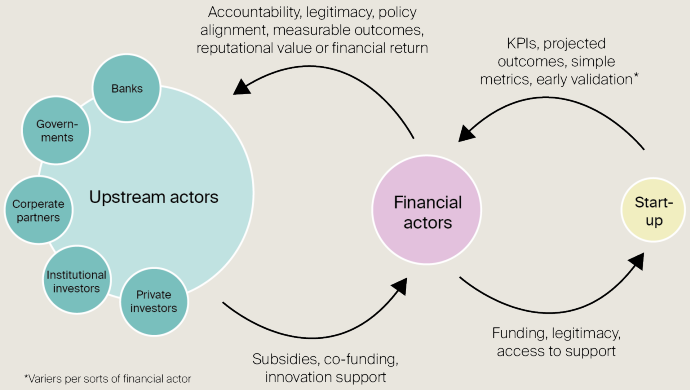
The conversations with Secrid and DOEN revealed important differences within this group. Public or institutional funding schemes often rely on standardised formats to remain objective and comparable. Mission-driven funders such as DOEN appear more open to broader and evolving definitions of impact, and may support initiatives that do not promise rapid economic growth, provided that they show meaningful social or environmental value and the potential to become self-sustaining over time. Secrid similarly looks for strong impact potential, but places more emphasis on whether both the start-up and its impact can grow and reach broader groups.

These demands are not shaped by the funders themselves alone. As Figure 21 shows, financial actors are positioned within wider upstream funding structures (governments, banks, private and institutional investors, and corporate partners) which bring their own expectations of policy alignment, measurable outcomes, reputational value, or financial return. Impact communication toward financial actors is therefore indirectly shaped by the accountability system behind them (Mulgan, 2010).

### 7.5.3 Professional partners

Professional partners (commissioners, clients, production partners, larger companies, and certification actors) relate impact to trust, feasibility, and fit. They want to know whether claims are credible, whether the innovation works in practice, and whether it aligns with technical, operational, or procurement requirements.

*Figure 21 Upstream funding structures behind financial actors in start-up impact communication*




### 7.5.4 Consumers and broader publics

Consumers and broader publics mainly need impact communication that is understandable, concrete, and believable. Rather than technical reports, they respond to a clear and accessible story explaining why the venture matters and what kind of change it contributes to. Start-up A imagined a more accessible visual format, such as a counter or icon-based representation on a website; Start-up E noted that consumers respond not only to proof but also to a well-told story. The challenge here is to make impact communication both simple and credible.

### 7.5.5 Internal stakeholders

Internal stakeholders (founders, team members, and close collaborators) use impact communication to support focus, alignment, and decision-making within the venture. It helps clarify purpose, track whether the venture is moving in the right direction, and build a shared understanding of the change being pursued. This was especially visible in Start-up A, D, and E, where impact was framed not only as something to show externally but as something that helps to understand whether the venture is on track and where value is being created. WIP again strongly emphasised this internal dimension as a key site of reflection and direction-setting.

## 7.6 Key insights from the exploratory research

Bringing the four sub-questions together, the exploratory research surfaces a connected picture of how impact is experienced, mobilized, and addressed in the Secrid start-up context (Figure 22). Four insights follow.

**Impact in early-stage ventures is emergent, not fixed**
A first key insight is that impact in early-stage ventures is often emergent rather than fixed. In the literature, impact is described as a long-term effect that unfolds over time and is closely linked to broader systems of change. In systemic design and transition theory, meaningful contribution does not only lie in measurable outputs, but also in experimentation, positioning, learning, and enabling wider shifts. Many start-ups are still shaping their product, position, and contribution to broader change. As a result, impact cannot always be captured through predefined indicators alone but must first be articulated and developed over time.

**Impact needs are stage-dependent, moment-dependent, and stakeholder-dependent**
Second, impact communication is stage-dependent and moment-dependent. The five recurring moments: first mentor conversation, funding application, partnership, pilots and scaling, and internal strategy, each call for a different form of impact articulation, ranging from formal evidence to narrative to internal reflection. This means support cannot consist of a single format. Different moments require different registers of impact, and any tool that aims to support start-ups across their journey will need to accommodate that variation.

Impact communication is also stakeholder-dependent. The five stakeholder groups have markedly different expectations. The challenge for start-ups is not only to produce impact information but to translate it across audiences.

**The core challenge is not measurement alone, but translation of systemic transition**
Third, the systemic perspective developed in Chapter 5 finds clear empirical resonance here. Start-ups themselves describe their work in terms of system change, transitions, and broader contribution, but the dominant frameworks they encounter remain anchored in linear, output-oriented logic. This gap between how start-ups understand their own impact and how they are asked to demonstrate it is thve central tension that shapes the design direction taken in the chapters that follow.

**Existing frameworks privilege what is countable over what is meaningful**
A fourth insight is that existing frameworks tend to privilege what is countable over what is meaningful. The framework analysis showed that environmental indicators such as emissions, energy, and water are much more standardized than social or systemic forms of impact. The interviews confirmed that start-ups struggle to express qualitative effects such as awareness, inclusion, behavioral change, and strategic system influence through conventional frameworks.

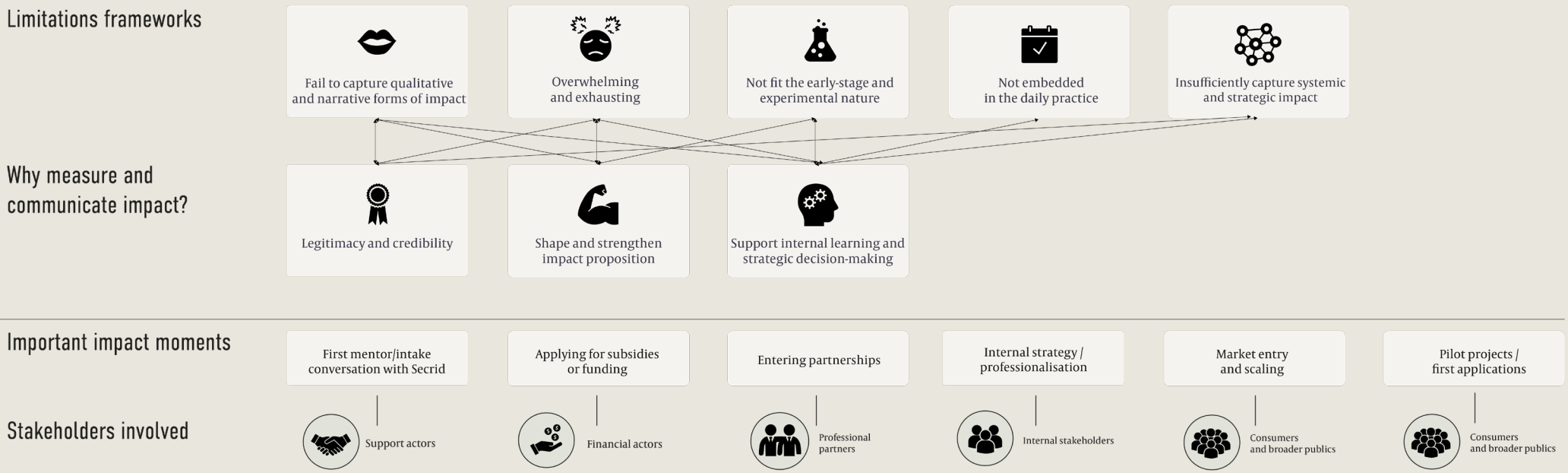



*Figure 22 Key findings exploratory review*

# III. IDEATION

*Here the research turns into design. Five limitations open up into forty-eight ideas, filtered down to six prototypes and tested with the start-ups of the Impact Fund.*


08 From limitations to six prototypes

09 Testing the prototypes


**Phase of chapter**
*Develop*

# Ideation process

The Ideation is where the project moves from understanding to making. Where *Introduction of research* established the problem and *Researching impact* mapped the landscape of impact measurement, this part turns everything the research surfaced into design. It follows a single arc. In the **divergent** phase, the five research-grounded limitations are reframed into five exploration directions and expanded into forty-eight ideas. In the **convergent** phase, those ideas are filtered through the C-Box to fifteen, clustered into nine, and developed into six lo-fi prototypes that are tested with start-ups of Secrid impact fund. In the **synthesis** phase, the prototypes are weighed against the criteria and folded into one connected app concept. The doorstep of the final concept developed in Part IV. Figure 23 traces that arc in full: each narrowing is a deliberate selection step, documented in the chapters and appendices that follow.

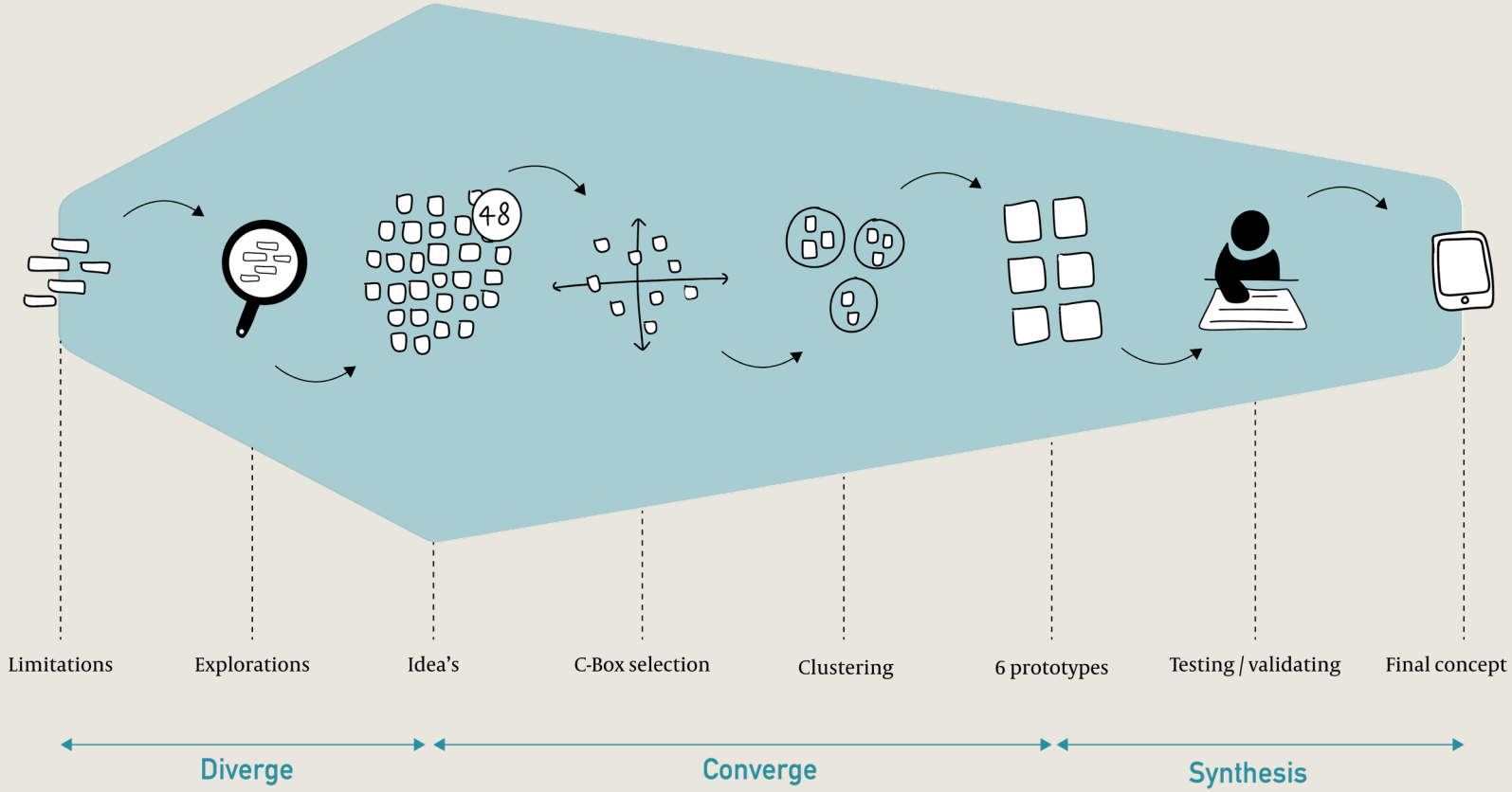



*Figure 23 . Funnel of ideation visual*

# 08. From limitations to six prototypes

**This chapter dives into the divergent phase, insights of Part II opened up a design space and how that space narrowed to six concrete tools. It moves from the five limitations into exploration directions and building blocks.**

## 8.1 From limitations to exploration directions

The five limitations, from the key insides from chapter 7, are each reframed as a generative question and explored through reference collection, analogies, and mapping (documented in full in Appendix B.1).

### 8.1.1 Exploration 1 - How can a tool feel light rather than overwhelming?

Examples of products, services, and rituals that feel effortless were collected, alongside analogies from everyday life (see Appendix B.1). On the basis of those examples, a How-Can-You brainstorm was made, mapping the elements that consistently appear in non-overwhelming experiences (Figure 24). The recurring elements: showing progress, offering a coach, breaking the activity into steps, and a calm visual interface, gave the ideation a concrete set of building blocks for making a tool feel light.

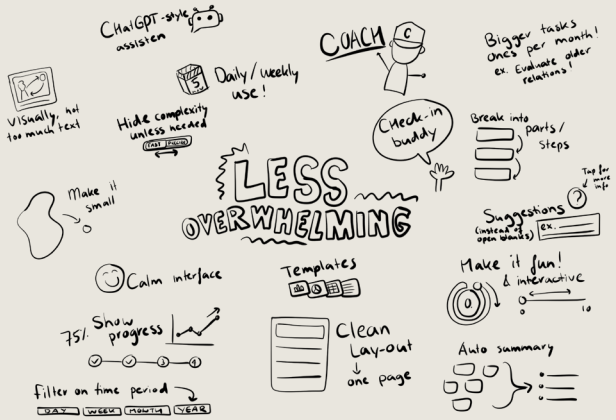



*Figure 24 How Can I? Of making something less overwhelming*

### 8.1.2 Exploration 2 — How can qualitative and narrative impact be captured quickly?

Before designing for impact capture, it was necessary to understand the act of logging itself. A How-Can-You exploration was made around the question: how can you log something? (see Figure 25) It distinguishes three registers. Quick captures are the lightest: a photo, a memo, a post-it, a checkbox, a single sentence (things that can be logged in a second). Structured logs are heavier: a questionnaire, a database entry, or a template. Reflective logs are the slowest: a diary, a reflective session, or an end-of-week prompt. This framework gave the prototyping phase a vocabulary for the depth of logging that any given idea was reaching for.

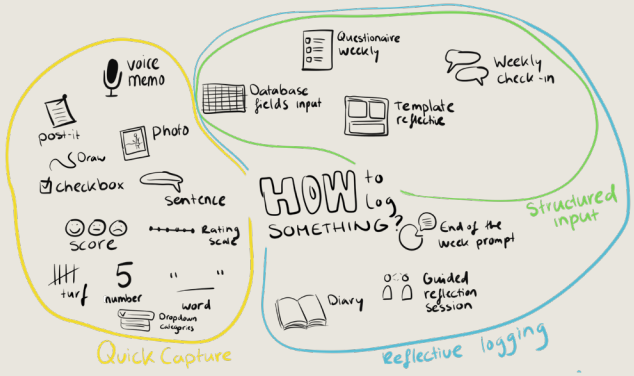



*Figure 25 - How Can You of how to capture something*

### 8.1.3 Exploration 3 - How can a tool fit the experimental, in-progress nature of early-stage work?

Examples of flexible, low-commitment capture formats that still surface complex data were gathereD. The lesson carried forward is that the design should not orient itself toward an end product, but toward the iterative process the start-up is in the middle of.

### 8.1.4 Exploration 4— How can a tool live inside daily practice?

This direction was explored by mapping what the daily and weekly practice of a start-up actually looks like. A short open question was sent to all start-ups; two responses formed the basis of the daily and weekly overview shown in Figure 26. The questions asked were: *How does a workday typically begin? Which activities recur almost every day? Are there fixed weekly moments such as team meetings, check-ins, or evaluations?* The two responses were summarised and split into daily and weekly activities.

### 8.1.5 Exploration 5 — How can systemic and strategic impact be captured?

A morphological map was built (Figure 27) around the four core practices of the Delft Systemic Design Lab (Goss et al., 2026) — framing complexity, meaningful formgiving, building relations, and nurturing reflexivity — to surface concrete ideas for making these practices visible in a tool. This helped to get the ideation going around these practices.

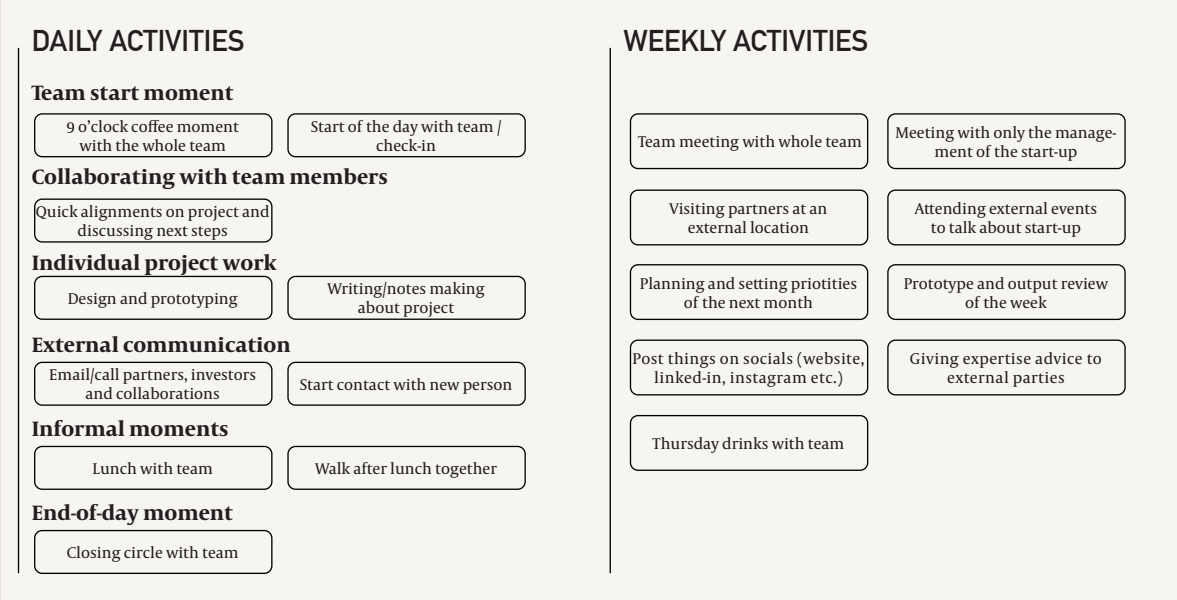



*Figure 26 - Summary of daily and weekly activities of start-ups*

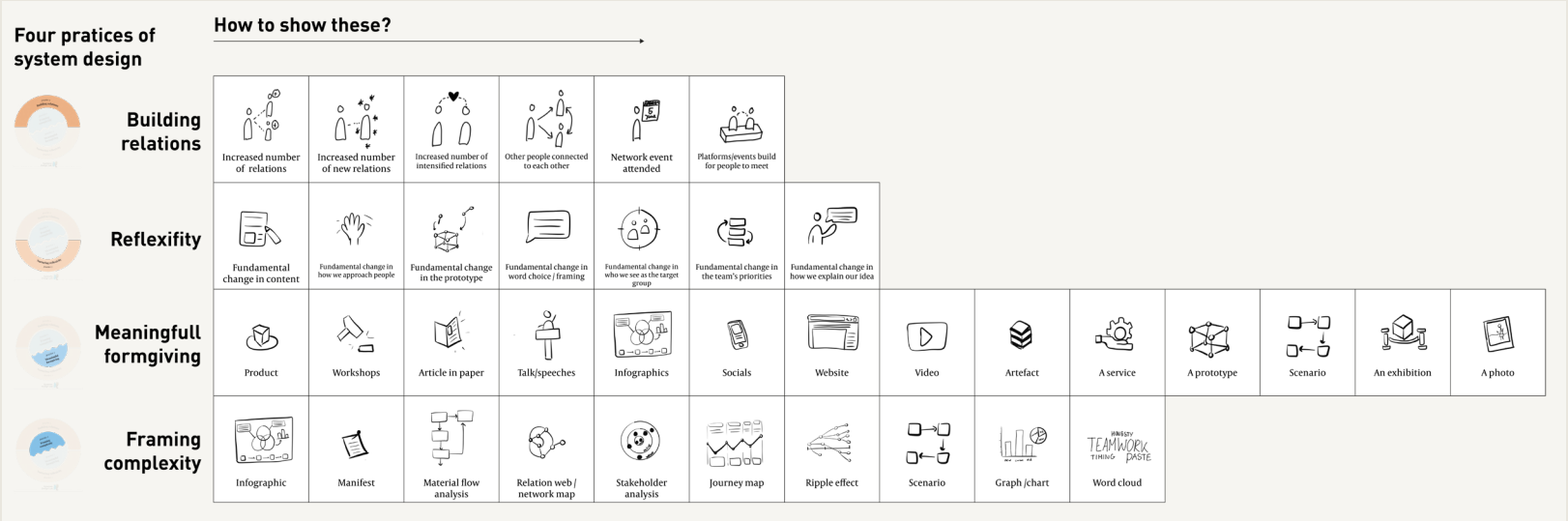



*Figure 27 - Morphological card of the four design principles*

## 8.2 Building the ideation framework

The explorations converged into three foundational building blocks that carry into the ideation phase. The first is a capture tool: a photo, a note, a map marker, a line of text, a voice memo etc. The second is a start-up activity overview: a model of the daily and weekly moments where a capture tool could live. The third layer, drawn from the systemic lens, defines what is asked back after one to two months: which reflective question is posed, and which systemic shift it is designed to surface.

This structure did two things. It forced every idea to be a complete loop, moment, capture, reflection, rather than a capture format on its own; and it made the design space visible, since varying any single layer generated a new idea. The framework was turned into two templates: a personal one for solo ideation, and a two-part co-creation template (first input and output, then reflection, see Figure 28) used in the sessions. Both templates are documented in Appendix B.2.

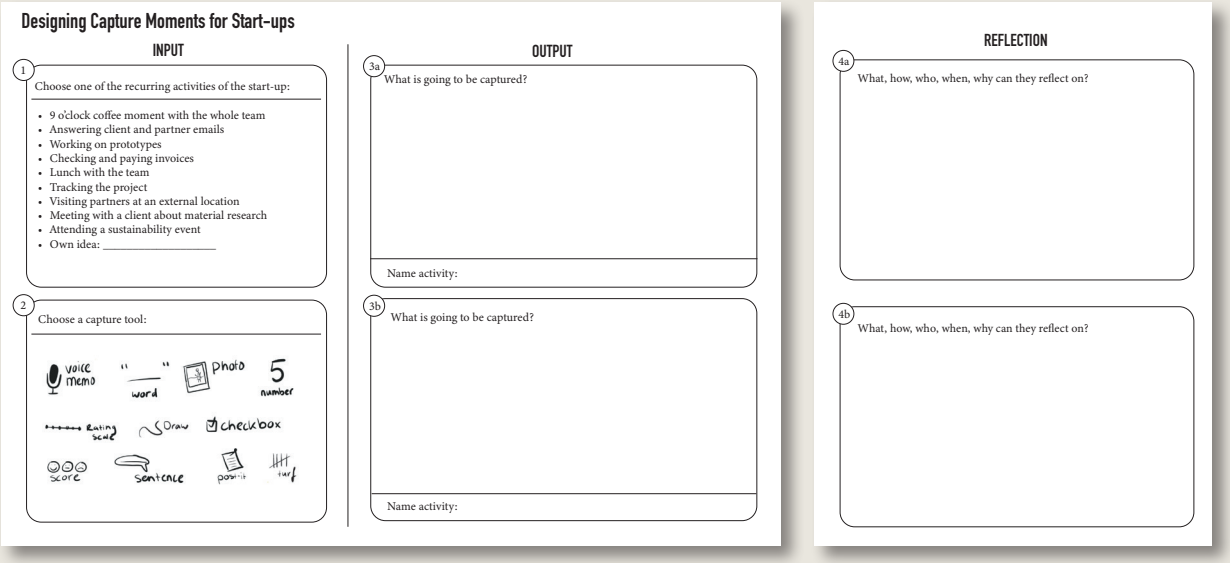



*Figure 28 - Ideation framework for co-creations*

## 8.3 Generating ideas: solo and co-creation

Idea generation happened in two waves: a solo phase, followed by a series of co-creation sessions. The first wave was a personal pass through the three-layer framework. By systematically varying the capture tool, the moment, and the reflective question, 34 distinct ideas were generated. See appenxif B.3 for results.

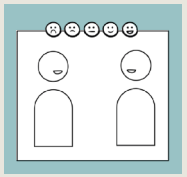
To bring in perspectives other than my own, the co-creation template was used in seven sessions with intentionally diverse participants. Four were Secrid employees, who could ground ideas in the lived reality of the Fund. Two were PhD students with research backgrounds, including Juwe van Vliet, who contributed a strong systems-thinking perspective; the seventh was electrical-engineering student Thomas van Teeseling. The seven sessions produced 14 additional ideas, bringing the total to 48. All 48 are documented in Appendix B.4 and formed the input for the C-Box selection.

## 8.4 Selecting with the C-BOX

To weigh forty-eight ideas against more than one criterion at once, the C-Box (Tassoul & Buijs, 2007) was used: a two-axis matrix on which every idea is plotted, making patterns of strength and weakness legible across a large set. *Feasibility* captures how realistically a start-up can carry out the documentation activity without much time, structure, explanation, or facilitation. I*mpact Insight Value* captures how much an idea can reveal about a start-up's longer-term impact, stakeholders, decisions, and direction. The selection zone centred on the sweet spot of high Impact Insight Value with low-to-medium Feasibility effort. This zone held fifteen ideas, which moved into clustering. The full plot, the selection zone, and the mapping are in Appendix B.5.

## 8.5 The six prototypes

The fifteen ideas in the selection zone were grouped by underlying logic, a shared moment, capture mechanism, or type of reflective question, rather than by surface form, producing nine clusters (see Appendix B.6), each holding the strongest elements of two or three ideas. Six of the nine were developed into lo-fi prototypes, selected on a personal judgement of which combined the strongest imaginative pull and design clarity: the clusters that felt most worth testing in front of founders. The six vary in capture form (online and physical), in moment (immediate, end-of-day, situational), and in reflective depth. See appendix B.7 for all the designs in detail.



### Prototype 1: Log the interaction (online)

This prototype asks the founder to look back at three recent connections and record who they spoke to, the type of relationship, and one PrEmo emotion per contact, making the growth and emotional depth of the network legible over time.

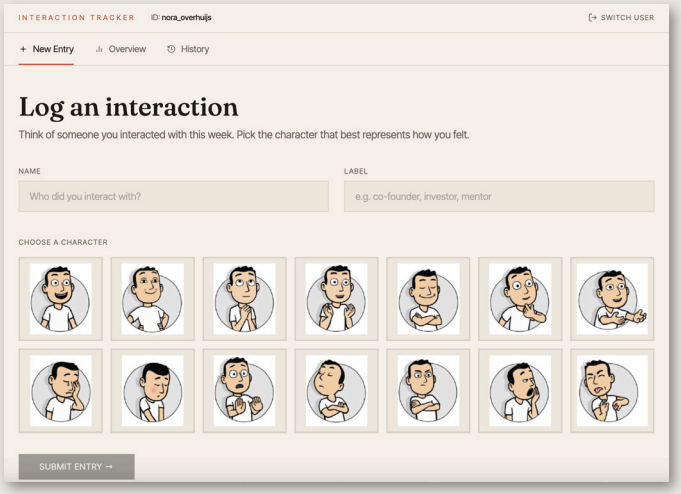
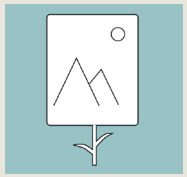



*Figure 29 - Interaction log website interface, made together with Claude.AI*



### Prototype 2: Origin story (online)

This prototype asks the founder to upload one photo from the start of the venture and answer what it shows and why it still matters, anchoring their entry point into the system and inviting reflexive reflection on how far they have come.

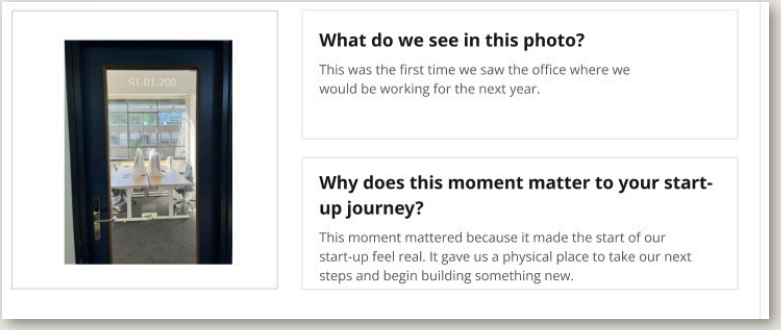
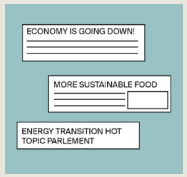



*Figure 30 - Origion story Miro interface*




### Prototype 3: Urgency headlines (online)

This prototype asks the founder to find one or two public headlines that frame the problem the venture addresses, testing how well they connect their internal story to external, societal urgency.

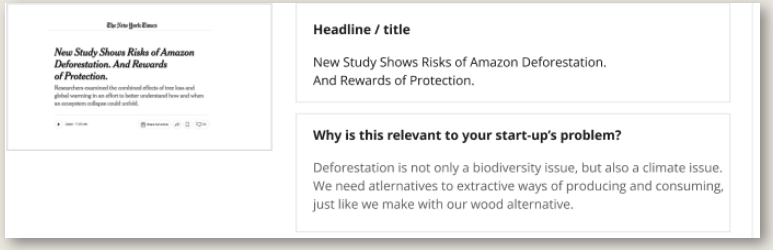
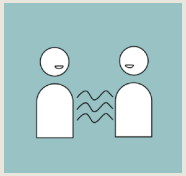



*Figure 31 - Urgency headline Miro interface*



## Prototype 4: Relationship line (online)

This prototype asks the founder to map how one meaningful relationship feels now and how they would like it to develop, turning a static stakeholder view into a sense of relational trajectory and intention.

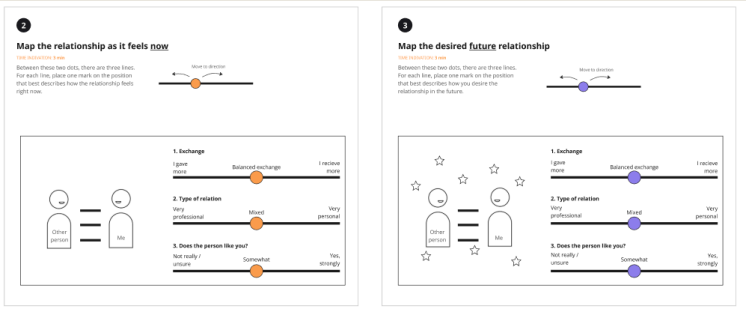



*Figure 32 - Relationship Line Miro interface*

## Prototype 5: Map your moves (physical)

This prototype asks the founder to mark on a map of the Netherlands or Europe the three places where the venture was active that day or week, making its geographic reach, scale, and ripple effects tangible.

*Figure 31 - Map your moves phsyical papers*

## Prototype 6: Story spark (physical)

This prototype asks the founder to isolate one recent moment in which someone visibly reacted to part of their story, and reflect on what was shared and why it landed, surfacing which framings are doing the work.

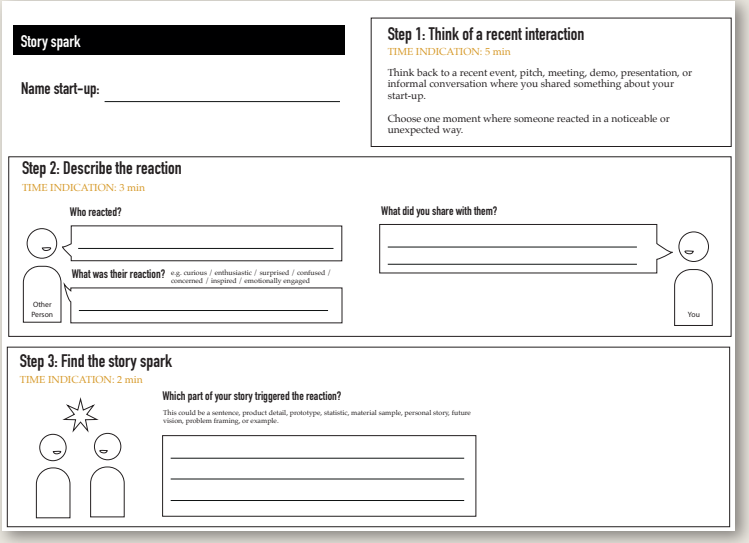



*Figure 32 - Story Sprak phsyical papers*

# 09. Testing prototypes

**Where Chapter 8 ended with six lo-fi prototypes, this chapter puts them in front of founders. It describes the testing setup with the new Secrid Impact Fund cohort, the criteria against which the prototypes were scored, and the three analytical lenses applied to the results. At the end a final concept will be presented.**

## 9.1 Testing setup and methodology

The prototypes were tested with the newly selected 2026 start-ups from the Secrid Impact Fund, across six thirty-minute sessions per start-up, producing twelve completed tests. Each session held two tests: one I assigned beforehand to balance online and physical formats, and one the participant chose freely from the five prototypes on the table. That free choice was deliberate, since which prototype a founder reaches for is itself data on what communicates value at a glance. Each session closed with a short reflective interview, including a question on preferred delivery format. See full interview protocol in appendix B.9.

## 9.2 Test results

The first analytical lens is descriptive: what happened across the twelve tests. This section presents the quantitative observations (usage, duration, free choice) and a short summary per prototype. The full per-tool analysis is in Appendix B.9.

Across six sessions and twelve tests, five of the six prototypes were used. With the data from the tests: time, sessions and free chosen exercises, the following quantitative data results (see Figure 33)

Two patterns stand out. First, Map your moves was the fastest tool but generated the highest engagement: three out of three participants continued past the time limit, and several asked to take the map home. Second, Origin story and Urgency headlines were the two most chosen free options, suggesting their value was legible from the table.

*Figure 33- Quantative results testing prototypes with start-ups*

## 9.3 Cross-cutting themes

Beyond the per-tool observations, a thematic analysis was carried out on the qualitative data from all twelve tests: the in-session quotes, the reflective interviews, and the field observations. Seven themes emerged consistently across participants and prototypes. A selections of them are summarised below with one representative quote and the take away question it raised. The full thematic analysis is in Appendix X.

### Theme 1: The integration barrier

Founders wanted to use the tools, but only if they lived inside the systems they already use every day. Standalone tools, even good ones, felt like extra work.

> *"It needs to be truly integrated in your work environment, otherwise it is extremely hard." - Start-up*

Take away: The final design should feel like a natural extension of the apps founders already use every day, rather than a separate step in their routine?

### Theme 2: Physical sparks engagement, but the app is the goal

Physical prototypes produced visibly different engagement: hand-drawing, taking the artefact home. But when the same participants were asked about daily use, both pointed to an app. The pleasure of paper was real but context-bound.

> *"In real life, I would prefer it printed. I love putting things on the wall. But in daily life, it needs to be an app." - Start-up*

Take away: The final design should bring the tactile, unhurried quality of physical interaction into a digital format, so the app experience feels as personal and low-pressure as picking up a pen?

### Theme 4: Reflection hunger versus time scarcity

Every participant wanted to reflect more. Almost every participant also said time was the barrier. The protected window at Secrid's office was experienced as a rare luxury.

> *"I want to reflect more, but there is never time. Maybe at the end of the day, in a hotel." - Start-up*

Take away: The final design should create micro-moments of reflection that require almost no time, tools that meet founders in the brief gaps they already have rather than asking them to carve out new ones?

### Theme 7: Everything should connect

Without prompting, participants began linking tools to each other: a story to an interaction, a headline to a milestone, a location to a meeting. The individual tools were valuable; the imagined system was more so.

> *"Everything should be linked: the map, the meetings, the stories. It should all connect." - Start-up*

Take away: The final design should create a system where each individual tool feeds into a larger, connected picture of the founder's journey, one that is visible and navigable over time?

This thematic analysis helped to translate six separate tool tests into a single set of design directions, marking the shift from validating individual tools toward designing one integrated, low-effort, digital system of reflection: the foundation for the next prototyping phase.

## 9.4 Selecting a concept

To select a concept idea for the next phase, the five concepts where evaluated based on five criteria (see Figure 34). These five criteria are not arbitrary: four of them translate the original limitations from 7.3 directly into evaluation terms. *Fit into daily routine* carries over the requirement that a tool live inside the daily practice. *Speed of execution and Low barrier* to entry both split out of the demand that a tool not be overwhelming or exhausting, one measuring the time a single use takes, the other the effort needed to start at all. *Long-term value* combines two requirements: that the tool fit the early-stage, experimental nature of these ventures, and that it help surface systemic and strategic impact over time. The fifth criterion, *Emotional engagement*, was not derived from a limitation but emerged during testing. One original requirement, capturing qualitative and narrative forms of impact, is deliberately left out of this round; it becomes the focus of the final prototype rather than of these short logs.

A few patterns are worth naming:

- **Map your moves** scores highest on three of the five criteria (Fit into daily routine, Emotional engagement, and Low barrier to entry), making it the most universally strong prototype.
- **Origin story** scores highest on Long-term value and Emotional engagement but does less well on Speed and Fit, matching its profile as a monthly rather than daily ritual.
- **Log the interaction** scores highest on Speed of execution and second on Fit, but lowest on Emotional engagement: a fast, useful, but emotionally flat experience.
- **Urgency headlines** is the weakest performer across the board, situational rather than habitual, with low Speed and middling Long-term value; its strength is contextual (pre-pitch, pre-investor) rather than ongoing.
- **Story spark** scores well on Long-term value and Emotional engagement but is constrained by the single data point.

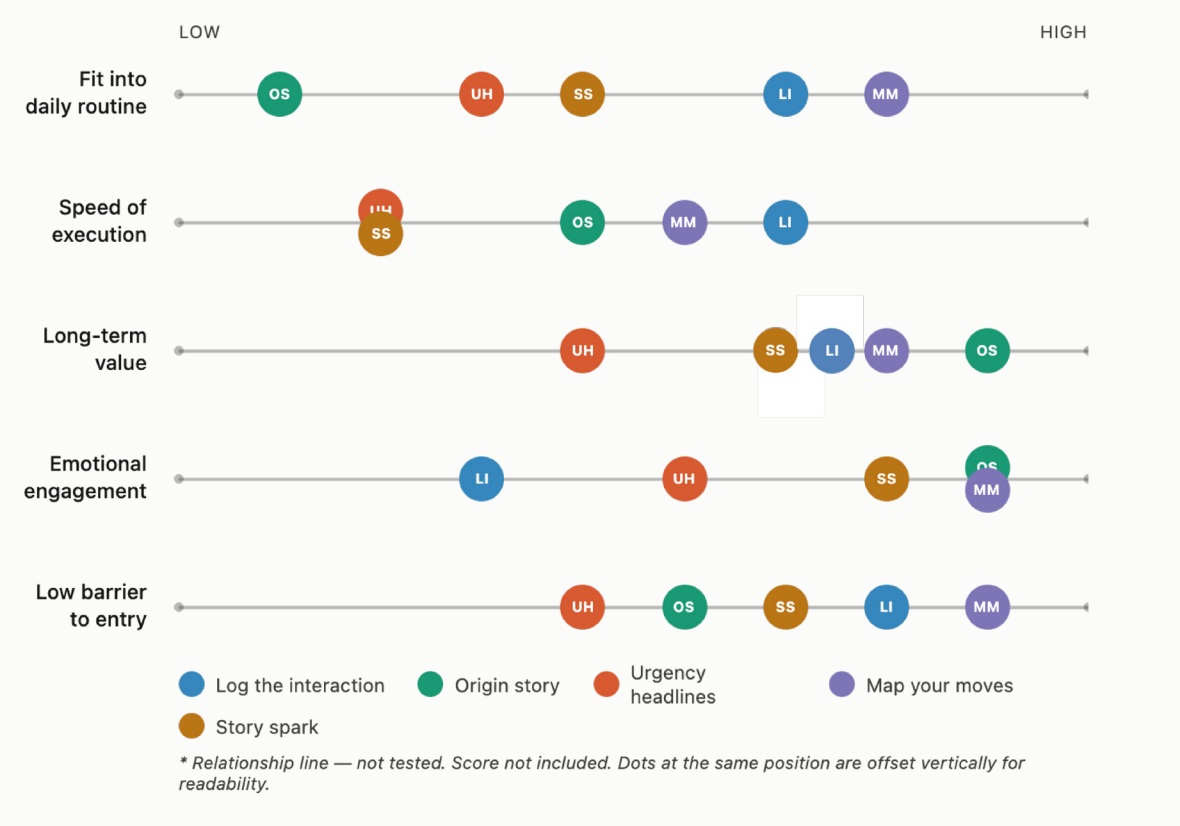



*Figure 34 - Evaluating concepts on criteria*

What the scoring makes visible is that no single prototype is strong on all five criteria. Every prototype has a clear strength profile. This pattern matters for the final prototype: it is one of the reasons the project moves toward a combined system of all prototypes in a form of one single tool.

# IV. FINAL DESIGN

*The tested prototypes fold into one connected concept: Trace, an impact companion made of an app, a quarterly report, and a set of games. This part presents the final design and evaluates it with start-up founders.*


**10** Final prototype: Trace Impact Package

**11** Evaluation


**Phase of chapter**
*Deliver*

# TRACE

Your impact
in your pocket!

# 10. Final prototype: Trace Impact Package

**This chapter presents the final design: Trace, an impact companion for earlystage founders. It is a package that travels with a venture across a full year in the Secrid Impact Fund. The chapter first introduces the three parts of that package and how they fit together over time, and then explains each part in turn: Beginning with the app, which is the heart of the design, followed by the quarterly reflection report and, finally, the impact games that open the journey. For every part the reasoning behind the design choices is made explicit: what each element does, why it is there, and how it helps a founder notice, hold on to, and tell the story of their impact.**

## 10.1 Trace Impact package

The final design is a package called Trace, with the app as its central design. It brings together three parts that accompany a venture across its year in the Secrid Impact Fund, each with its own rhythm:

### The app

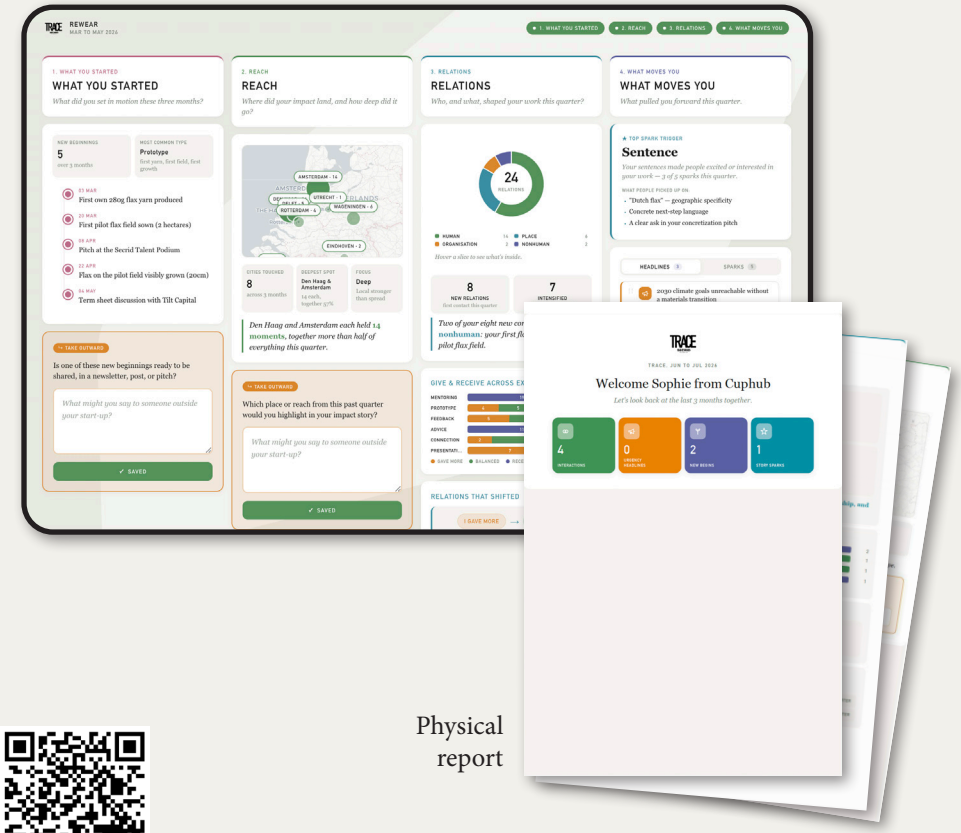
The app,  is the spine of the package. Through four short loggs, founders capture small moments of impact as they happen: a conversation, a headline, a new step, a reaction for someone. It is designed to be used during the busy life of a start-up, a minute at a time, across the full twelve months.

Try the app!

## Quarterly report

The quarterly report turns that accumulated material into reflection. Every three months the captured moments are organised into a structured report (online or printed) that lets founders step back, see patterns, and build their impact story layer by layer over the year.

Online report

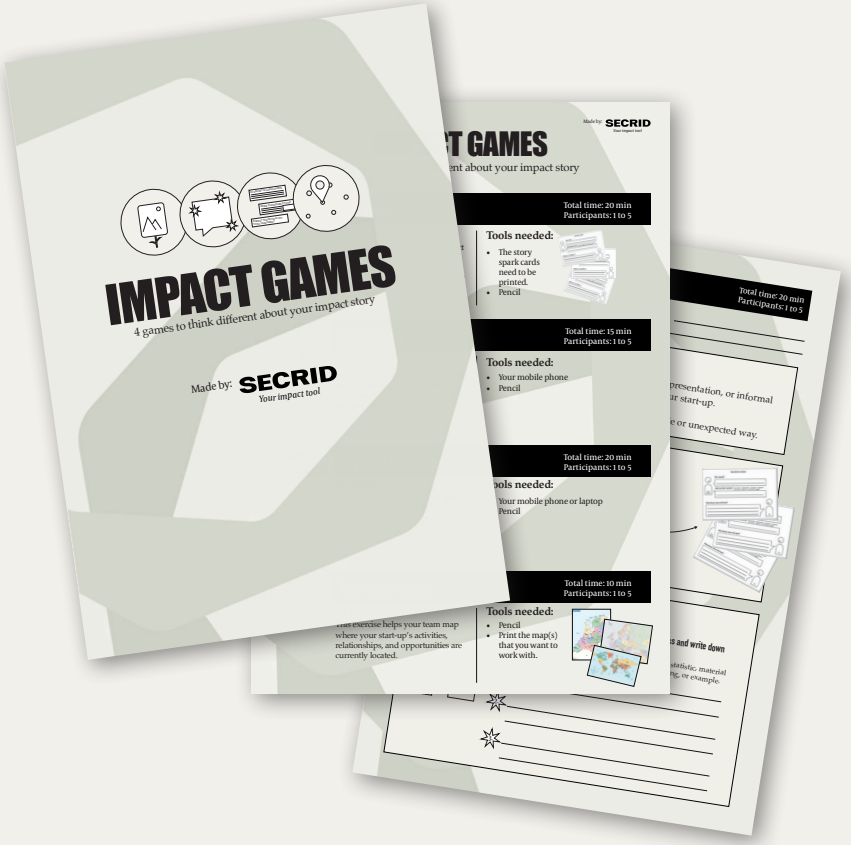



Physical report

Try the report!

## Impact games

The impact games open the year. They are played once, in person, at the kick-off during the Secrid Talent Podium process. They introduce founders to the dimensions of impact the rest of the package works with, in a light and playful way, and give the cohort a shared language before any app is opened.



## 10.2 The app

The app is the heart of the design. In testing, founders were drawn to physical materials but were unanimous that, for daily use, it had to be an app. Something that lives inside the systems they already open every day rather than asking them to carve out a separate step. The Trace App is built with the help of Claude.AI to make not only a interface, but a workable prototype. The most important wireframes are discussed in this section.

### 10.2.1 Overview and structure

Trace is organised around a simple structure, see Figure 35. A home dashboard greets the founder and invites a quick capture; the four tests are the core action of the app; a recent log holds everything that has been captured; and a calendar shows that capture spread over time. A bottom navigation bar moves between these. The whole app is built so that the most common action (capturing one small moment) is never more than a tap away.

### 10.2.2 The four logs

Capture in Trace happens through four short logs, which descend directly from the prototypes tested earlier: Log the interaction, Map your moves, Urgency headline, New begin, and Story spark. Each kept almost the same form, what changed came from that feedback, that the logs had to be fast, light, and live inside the systems founders already use. Each log is a small, self-contained loop that can be completed in under a minute, and the founder chooses whichever fits the day: nothing has to be done in order, and nothing is mandatory.

Together the four are grounded in the systemic-change literature that runs through this thesis. Two sources in particular shaped them. The first is the four core practices of the Delft Systemic Design Lab (Goss et al., 2026), among them framing complexity, meaningful form-giving, and building relations. The second is West et al. (2024), who set out five key concepts in transformations research and practice; three of them shaped this design: human-nature interconnectedness, agency and leadership, and scale and scaling.

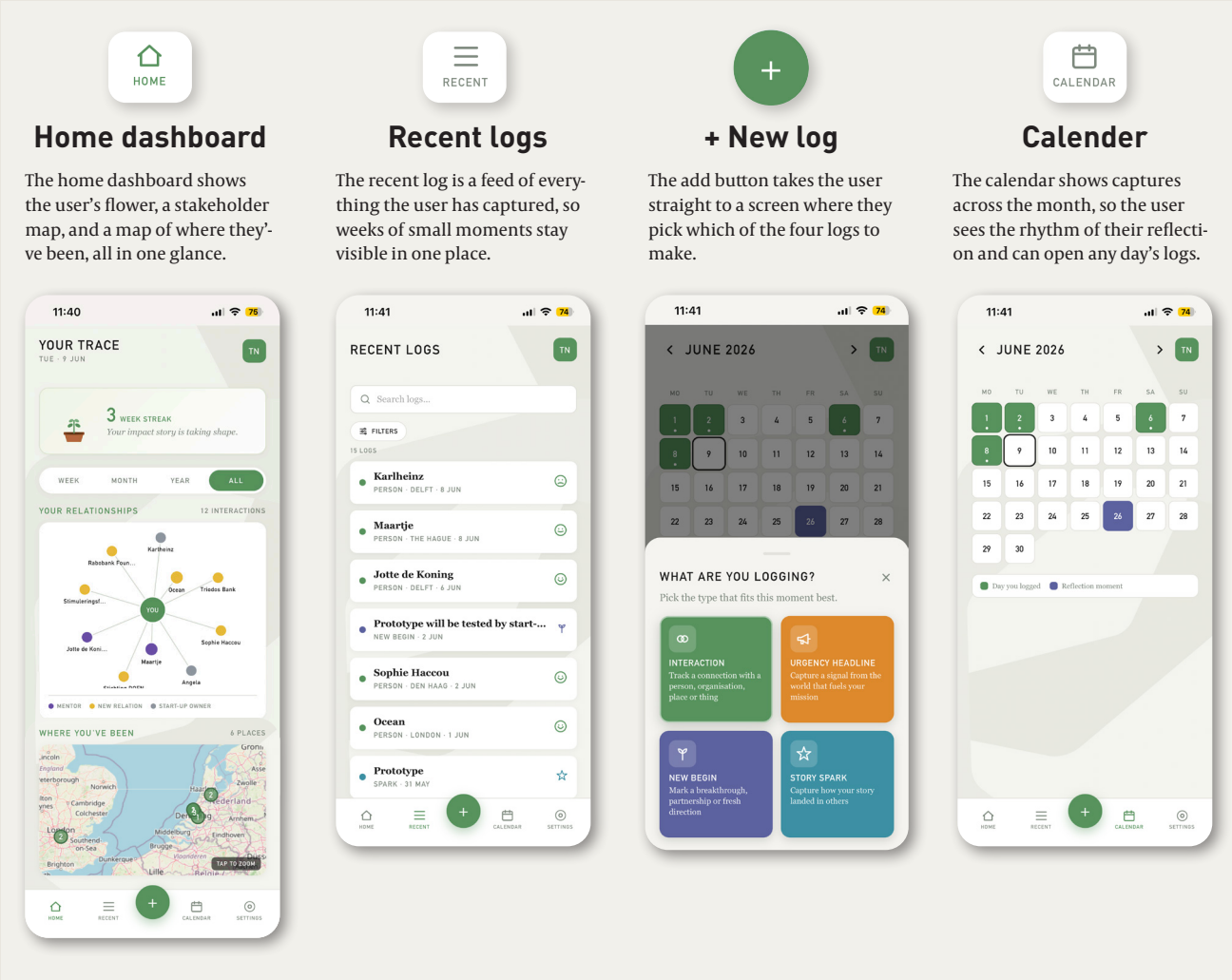



*Figure 35 Wireframe overview of Trace, showing the full screen flow: dashboard, the four tests, recent log, and calendar, connected by the bottom navigation.*

**Log the interaction**
The founder logs a recent interaction: who they spoke to, the type of relationship, and one emotion (five smileys). They can also dig deeper into a single relationship. This is optional by design (since time is often short) and lets the founder explore its thicker data: what is exchanged, whether it is professional or personal, and whether the other person appreciates them (see figure 36). The founder can also briefly note where the meeting took place; this is where the earlier Map your moves prototype is quietly folded in. A lot is asked here, so the how is varied: a drop-down, a slider, a smiley, a line of free writing, which keeps the log playful rather than a chore.

The log draws on two ideas: building relations, one of the Delft Systemic Design Lab's core practices, and human-nature interconnectedness. This is why a connection can be a person, an organisation, a place, or a non-human: a start-up might "meet" a whole organisation, or have seen a polluted river that inspired them to take new steps.

**Urgency headline**
The founder finds one or two public headlines (in a paper, on LinkedIn, on Instagram) that frame the problem their venture addresses. The log connects the venture's internal story to the world outside it. Early-stage founders are deep inside their own work, and it is easy to lose sight of why it matters now, to anyone else. Thizs log draws on framing complexity: the start-up is actively working to understand how its problem takes shape, and especially how it lives in the world around it. Tracking this strengthens the legitimacy side of a venture's impact story.

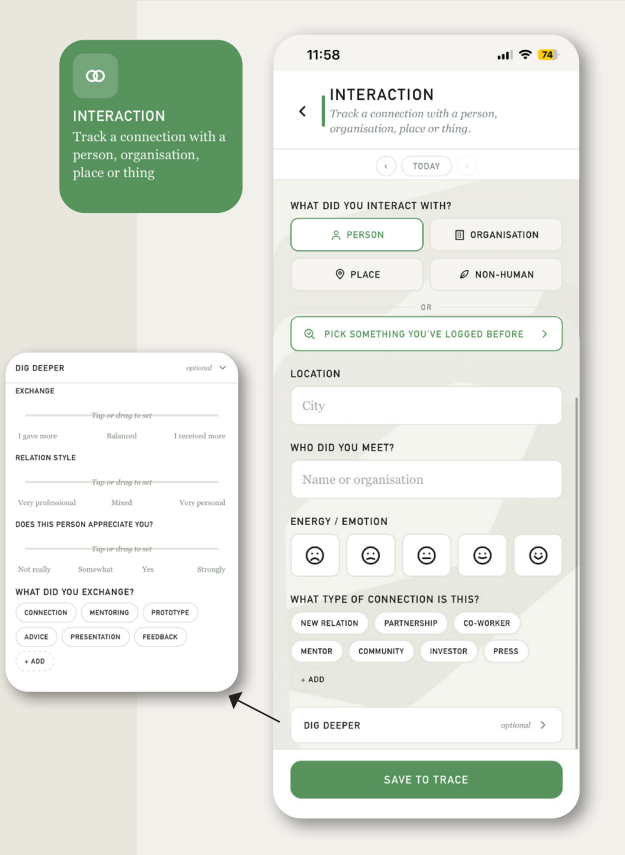



*Figure 36 Log the interaction logscreen*

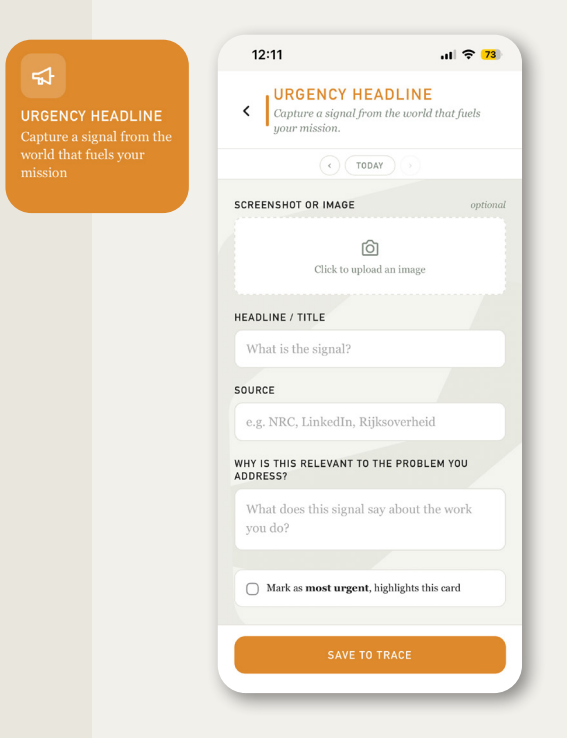



*Figure 37 Urgency headline logscreen*

**New begin**
In this log the founder marks a new beginning or fresh direction in the venture. They upload a photo and answer three questions: *what is this new beginning, what changed to make it possible, and why does this moment matter to your journey?* The log is reflective by form: instead of a single data point, it asks the founder to pause and make sense of a turning point as it happens.

Early-stage ventures are full of fresh starts, but these moments usually pass unmarked, and with them the reasoning behind them. Logging a new beginning keeps the founder connected to how and why the venture is shifting. It draws on *meaningful form-giving*: every new beginning is a new form the founder gives to their prototype. It is the slowest, most reflective log, closer to an occasional ritual than a daily one, but it carries high long-term value, because these turning points are often the most durable parts of a venture's impact narrative.

**Story spark**
The founder isolates one recent moment in which someone visibly reacted to part of their story. Three questions follow: what did you share, what was the reaction, and most importantly, what triggered it? They can log several reactions to one story and optionally tag what kind of share it was.
Founders tell their story constantly but rarely notice which version lands, which framing makes someone lean in. Capturing these sparks builds a growing library of moments that worked, and a sharper sense of how to communicate their impact. It also surfaces what triggered the reaction: the prototype, an example, a statistic, a sample? This is directly useful material for pitches, applications, and the quarterly report, and it trains a storytelling muscle early-stage ventures depend on but rarely build deliberately.

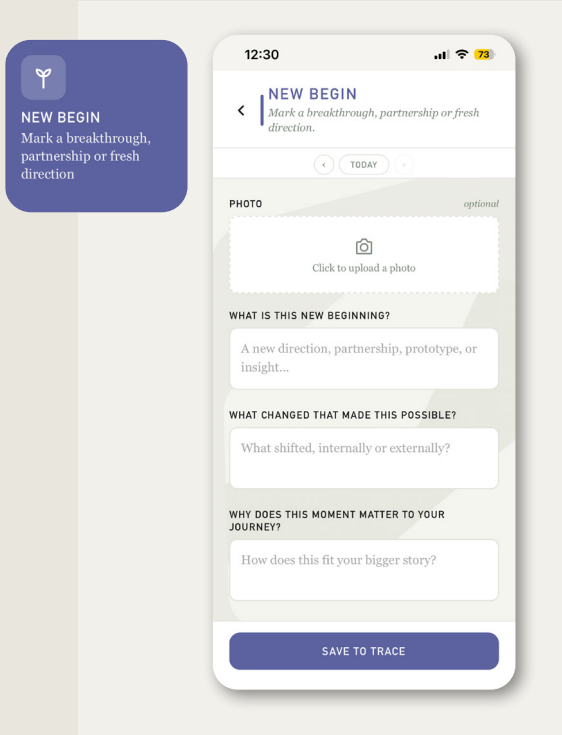



*Figure 38 - New begin logscreen*

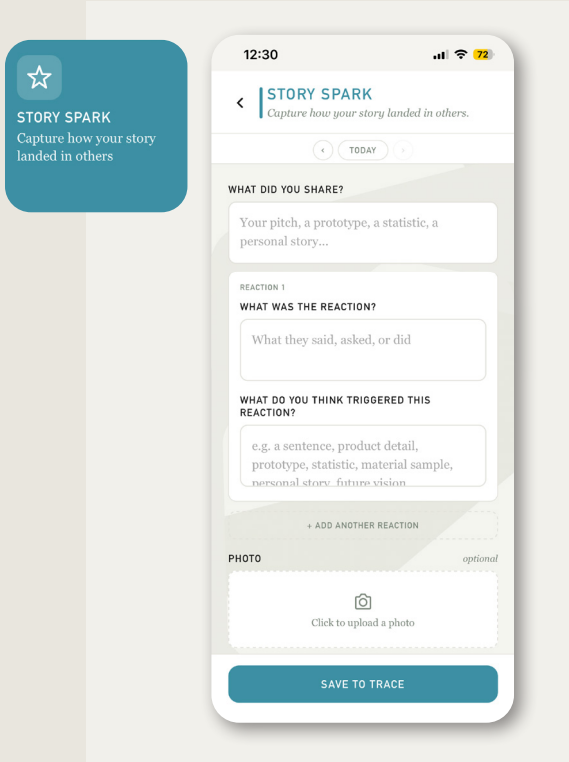



*Figure 39 - Story spark logscreen*

Three ideas inspired this log: *agency and leadership*, in giving founders a stronger, more deliberate voice for their story; *framing complexity*, in reading why a story lands, which deepens their grasp of how others understand the complex problem they work on. Also *meaningful formgiving* is triggered, in noticing which concrete form their story took when it resonated (a prototype, an example, a statistic, a sample) and learning to give their abstract impact a tangible, communicable shape.

### 10.2.3 First-time use

The first time a user opens Trace, a short onboarding is done to set some expectations and not overwhelm the user. It welcomes the user, let them create a user name, briefly introduces the four tests and finally shows how the wireframes are visually designed. It then invites two small set-up choices that the rest of the experience depends on: when to be reminded (morning or evening), and, optionally, whether to connect a calendar. This onboarding slides help the user to feel more comfortable in the interface.

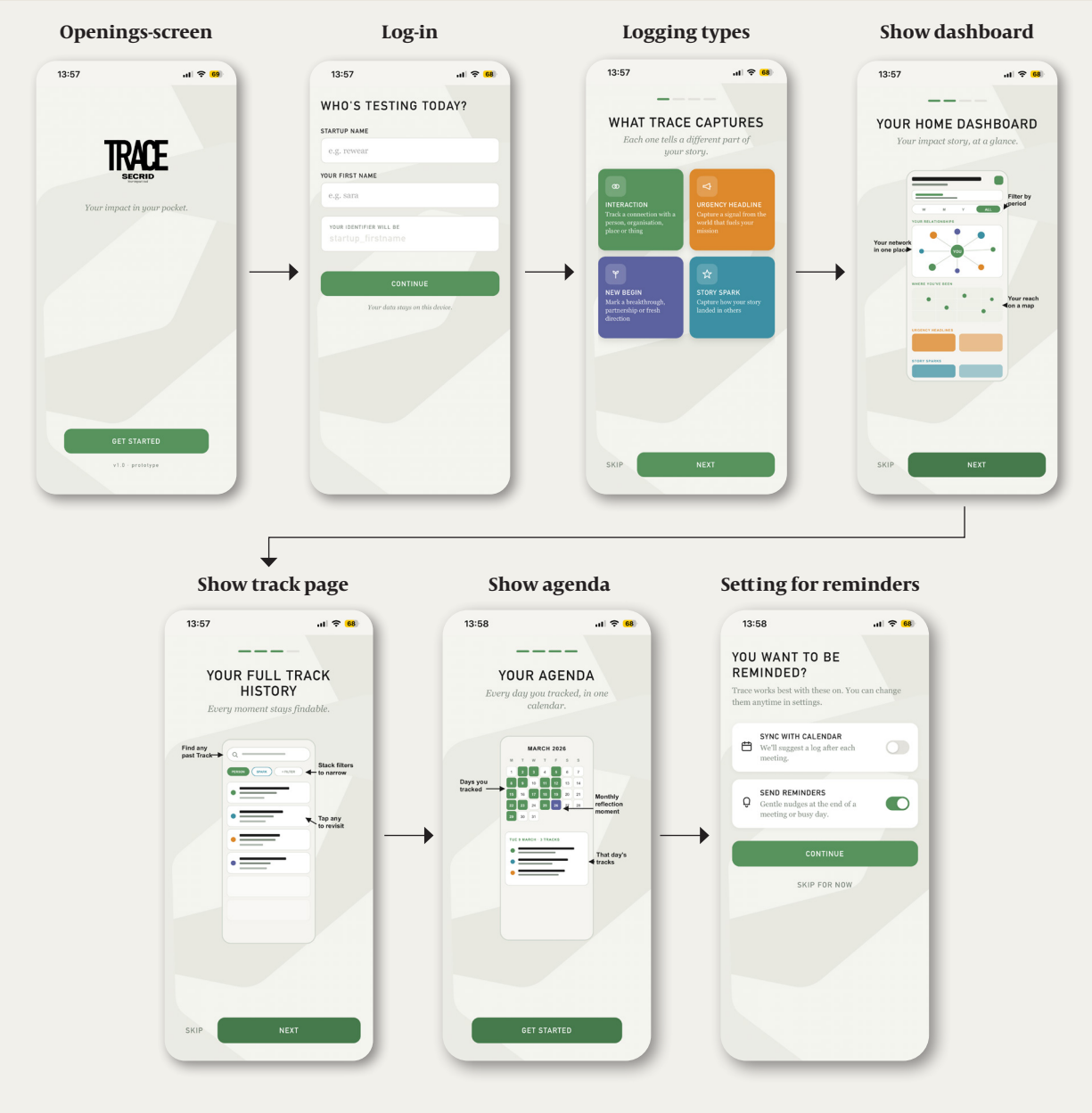



*Figure 40 First time use screens*

### 10.2.4 Staying with it: the motivation layer

To keep founders coming back, Trace uses a small set of gentle, non-coercive nudges. None of them punish a missed day; the aim is simply to keep start-ups actively connected to the app.

**The growing flower**

A plant that grows as the founder captures moments (see figure). It gives a soft, cumulative sense of progress: the reflection a founder has done becomes something they can watch grow.

**Morning and evening reminder**

The founder can choose to be nudged once a day, in the morning or the evening, with a short message reminding them to log.

**Calendar synchronisation**

The founder can connect their calendar. After each meeting in their agenda, Trace sends a notification inviting them to log something from it, so capturing slips into a moment that already happened.

**Widget**

The founder can add a widget to their home screen to jot quick notes without opening the app. The actual logging can happen later, with these notes as reminders of what they wanted to capture.

*Figure 41 Growing flower streak*

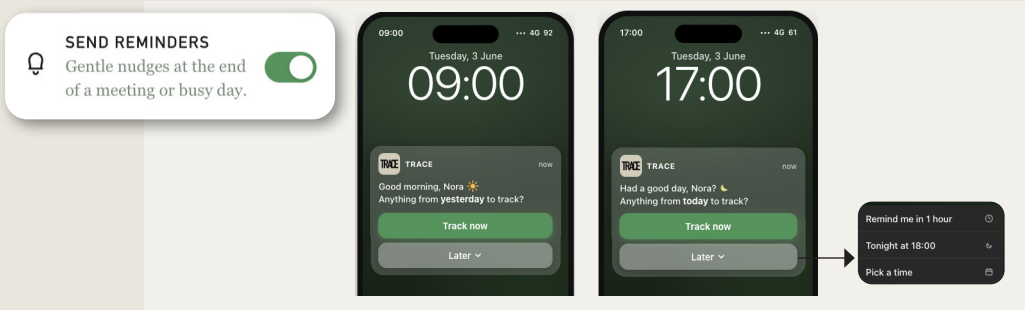



*Figure 42 Reminder messages in morning and afternoon*

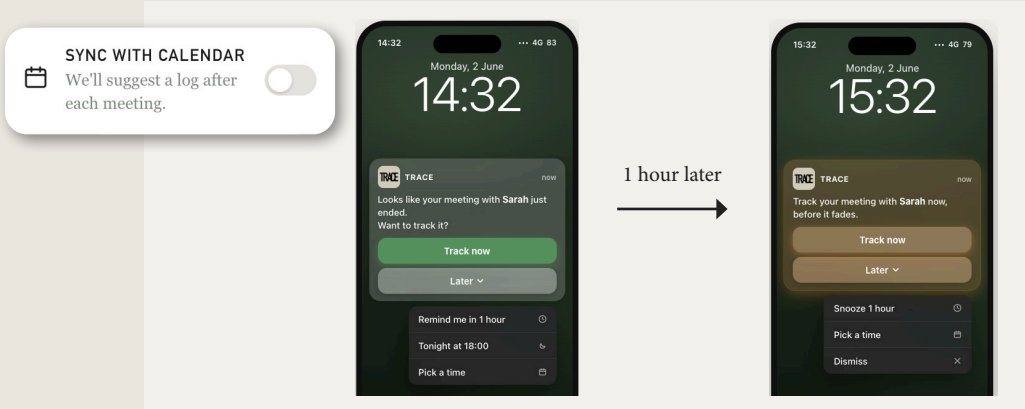



*Figure 43 Reminder messages after meeting from callender*

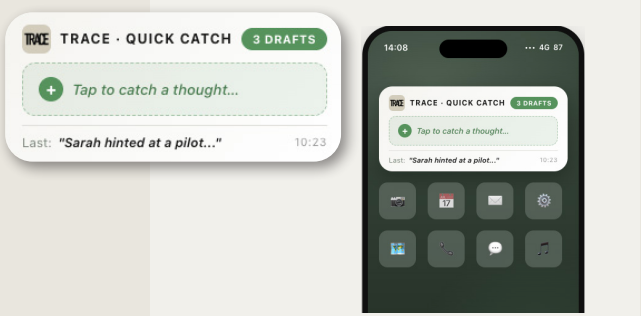



*Figure 44 Widget on home screen*

## 10.3 The quarterly report

Every three months, the moments captured in the app are turned into a structured reflection: the quarterly report. It adds no new data; it organises what is already there so that patterns become visible, helping the founder move from noticing to understanding and, most importantly, build a stronger impact story. The Trace quarterly report is built with the help of Claude.AI to make not only a interface, but a workable prototype. Unlike the app, which is fast and used in the moment, this reflection takes longer: the idea is to sit down and reflect, alone or with the team. This section walks through the most important elements of the interface.

### 10.3.1 Set-up screen

The report begins with a set-up screen, where the founder makes three choices that shape what the report becomes. First, whose data to include (the whole team's captures or one person's) because a report can serve either collective sense-making or individual reflection. Second, which period to reflect on, so the report can follow the quarter or a more specific stretch of time. Third, the output: an online report or a printed one (see appendix C.1 for physical one). These choices are deliberate; rather than producing one fixed artefact, the set-up lets the same captured material serve different purposes and different audiences.

### 10.3.2 Two formats: physical and online

The report comes in two forms. The printed version answers something testing made clear: founders love tactile material they can draw on, take home, and put on the wall, and it suits a team session or a pitch. The online version is shareable and living, easy to circulate, revisit, and send onward. Together they let the report be either a private object to sit with or a shared artefact to point to.

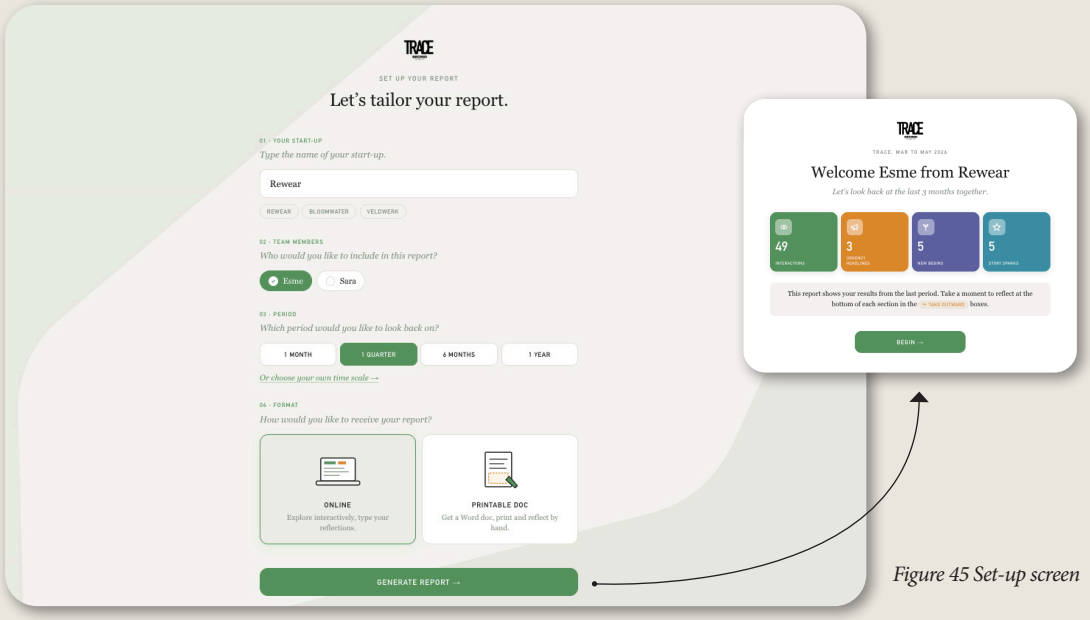
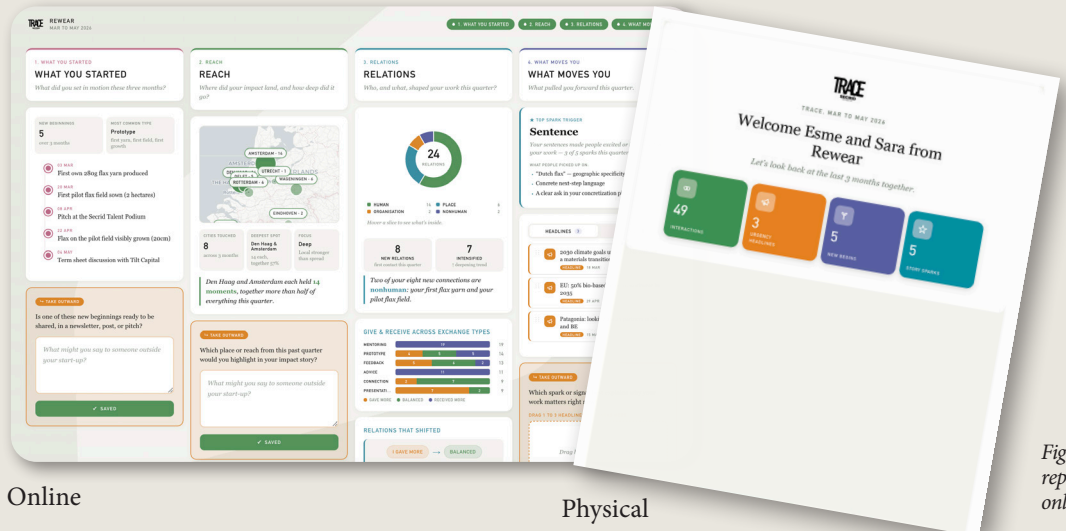



*Figure 45 Set-up screen*




Online

Physical

*Figure 46 Quartlery report physical and online version.*

### 10.3.3 The four layers

The online report is organised into four layers, read in a fixed order: what you started, reach, relations, and what moves you. At the end of every layer is a short reflective question. Each layer is a data analysis of the captured logs from the app ( documented in Appendix C.1) and helps to form four different elements for the impact story: what they started, reach, relations and what moves you. Each layer is described below.

**1. What you started**

What did the start-up set in motion this quarter, and what timeline does that create? In a single glance, the founder sees all the new beginnings they started and gave form to over the quarter, an expression of meaningful form-giving.

**2. Reach**

The reach layer maps the start-up's geodata: where have they been, how far does the work travel, and how does it connect to the wider problem it responds to? A few highlights are drawn from this data: how many cities the venture touched, how widely its activity is spread, and the most telling one: whether its reach is deep (a few places with intense, repeated engagement) or spread (many places, more lightly) which is inspired by West et al. (2024) (scaling out, scaling up and scaling deep).

**3. Relations**

The relations layer analyses the start-up's connections. It shows how many relations they hold across the four types (human, organisational, place, and non-human), how many are new, and how many have intensified, giving the founder a feel for where relationships are deepening. It then maps what is given and received across these relations, so the founder can reflect on where they give and take, and shows which relationships shifted over the quarter. Finally, it surfaces the three most appreciated relations. Together these make relationship-building visible through depth, change, and new connections: the practice of building relations from the four core practices of systemic design (Chapter 8.1).

**4. What moves you**

What moves you combines all the logged urgency headlines and story sparks. It opens with the top spark trigger: the element of their story that most often makes people react, then gives an overview of all the headlines and sparks from that period. Together these show how the start-up frames the complexity it works in: how it makes sense of the wider problem and puts that into words, the practice of framing complexity.

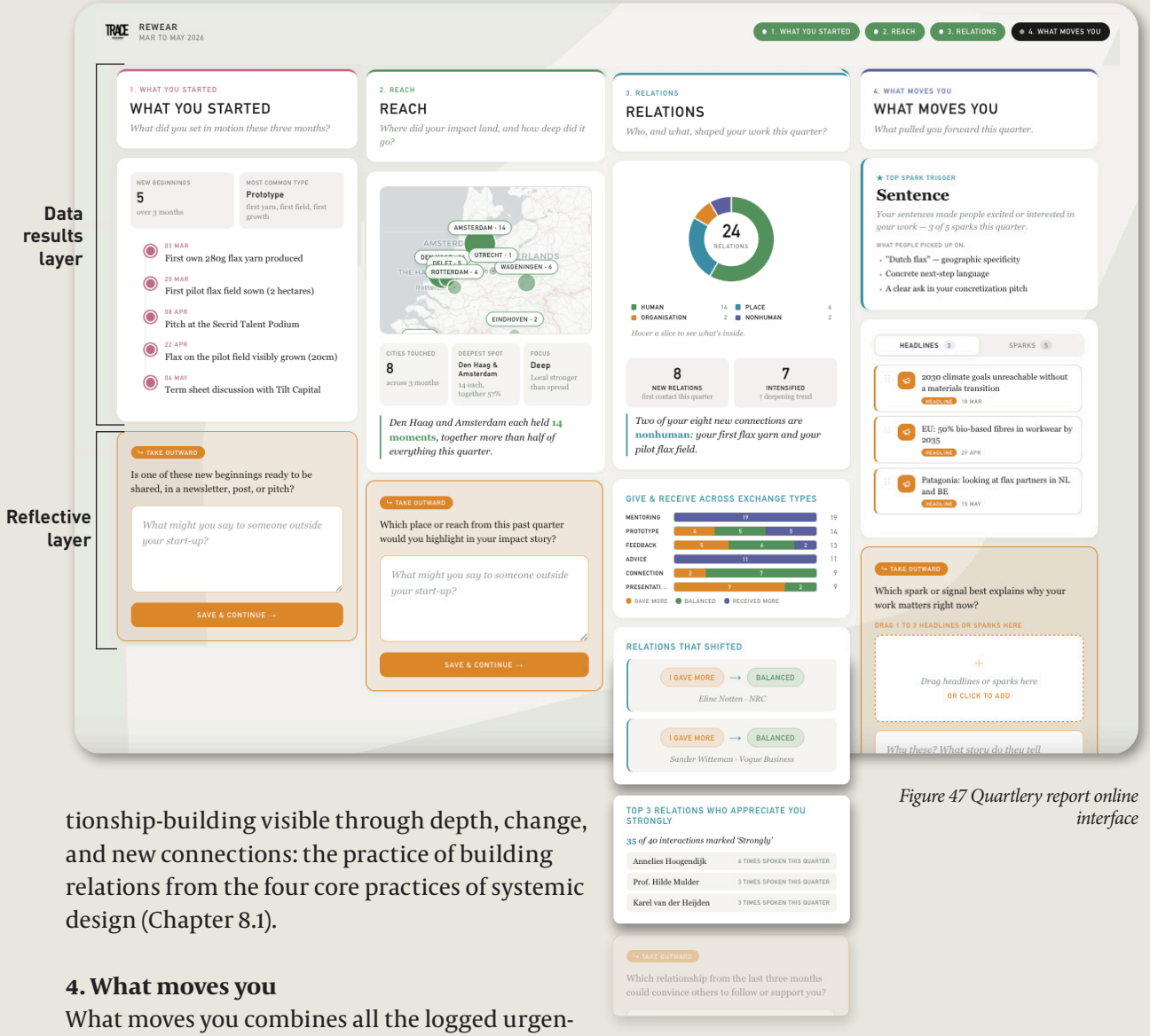



*Figure 47 Quartlery report online interface*

### 10.3.4 Reflective layer

Each layer ends with one reflective question that turns data into insight (see figure 48), asking the founder to interpret what the layer showed rather than just read it. This is where the report activates *nurturing reflexivity:* founders examine their own choices and think a step further, toward how to tell this to the outside world. The questions face outward, feeding and strengthening the impact story, and in the what moves you layer the founder drags and drops their favourite headlines and sparks into the reflection box, making tangible what they carry forward.

### 10.3.5 The order of the report and the locked layers

The order of the layers is a deliberate design choice. The report opens by grounding the founder in where they came from (new begin), moves outward to how the work spreads (reach), then inward to the relationships that carry it (relations), and finally down to the values beneath it all (what moves you).

To keep this from overwhelming the founder, the layers are locked: each one opens only once the previous layer has been reflected on. This paces the report into a guided sequence rather than a wall of data, and makes sure every reflection builds on the one before it.

### 10.3.6 The closing reflection

The report closes with a final reflection that zooms out across the whole quarter, built around three prompts (see figure 49):

- *What you notice — looking back across the quarter, what stands out?*
- *What you'll carry — what do you want to take forward into the next quarter?*
- *Your headline — if this quarter were a single line, what would it be?*

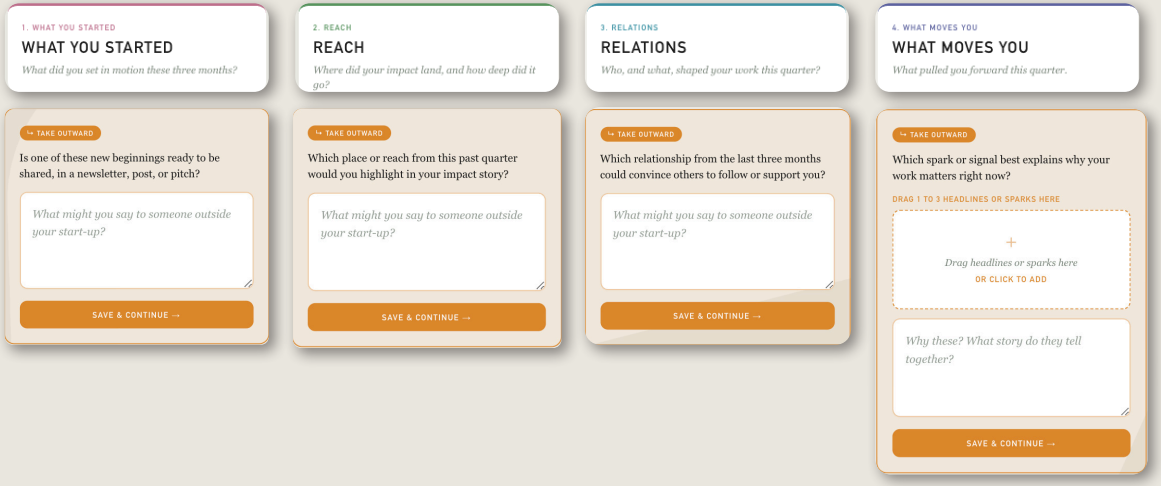



*Figure 48 The four reflective questions*

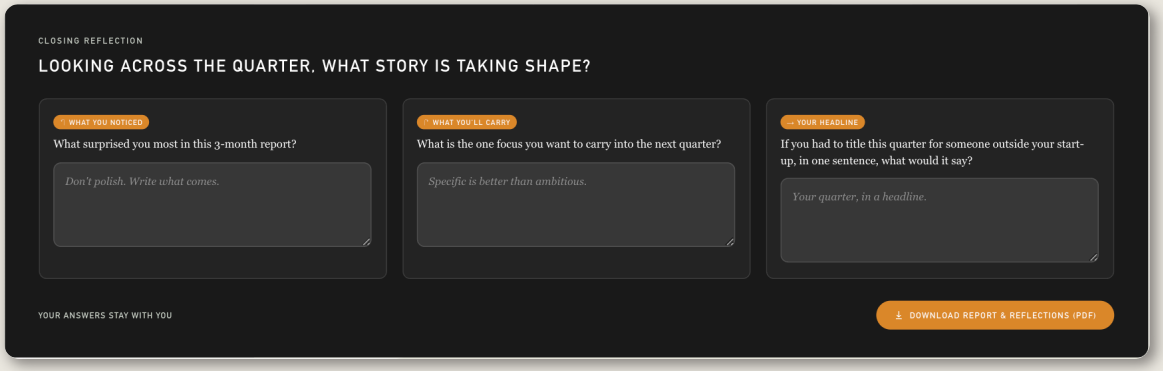



*Figure 49The closing reflection*

These three questions do the consolidating work of the whole package. After moving through the four layers, the founder steps back one more time and pulls the quarter into something they can hold and say. 'Your headline' is the sharpest of the three: a single line that captures the quarter, that feeds directly into the ongoing impact story they are building across the year. Over four quarters, these headlines are a strong storyline of change. After these three reflections the report can be downloaded and shared.

## 10.4 The impact games

The impact games are the entry point to the whole package, used only once, at the kick-off: the first moment the start-ups of the Secrid Talent Podium meet in real life. Their job is to introduce founders to the dimensions the app and report work with (interaction, reach, origin, story) before any digital tool appears. Impact often arrives as a serious, slightly intimidating word; the games make a first encounter with it playful and shared. A small PDF holds the games, with the rules and supplies needed, see appendix C.2 for full pdf.

Making this part physical and in-person is grounded in testing, where physical materials sparked the most engagement: founders drew, talked, and took artefacts home. The games are played within your own start-up (with your co-founders, or alone) but not together with other start-ups. The point is to look inward: for some games each person brings what they have, their best photo or story spark, and the team chooses together and inspires one another. Memories fade, and gathering these moments together works better than doing it apart. Played this way, the games let each founder experience the four lenses once, hands-on, and give the team a shared language for impact to build on. They are not a measurement exercise but an icebreaker with a purpose, warming founders up to a practice they then carry into the app.

## 10.5 Look and feel

The visual design was a deliberate choice. The colour palette, typeface, and style all sit within Secrid's house style, so the package feels like a natural part of the organisation rather than a separate tool (see figure 51). Colour is used calmly and the typeface kept clear and human, matching the light, low-pressure tone, and giving the app, report, and games one coherent visual language.

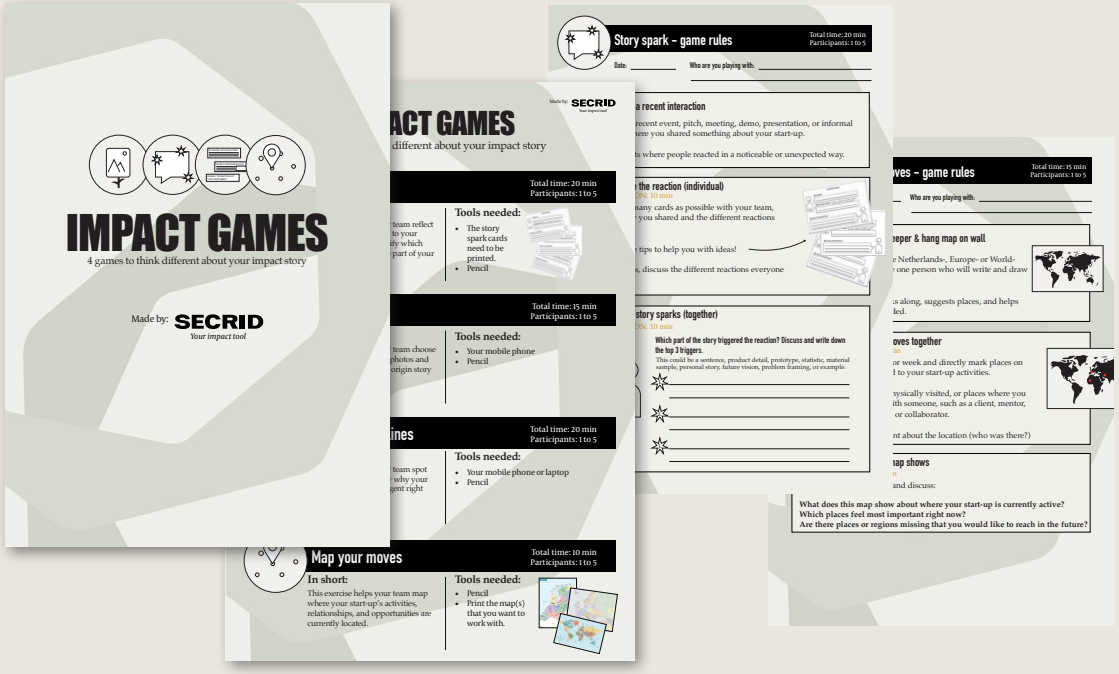



*Figure 50 Impact games pdf*

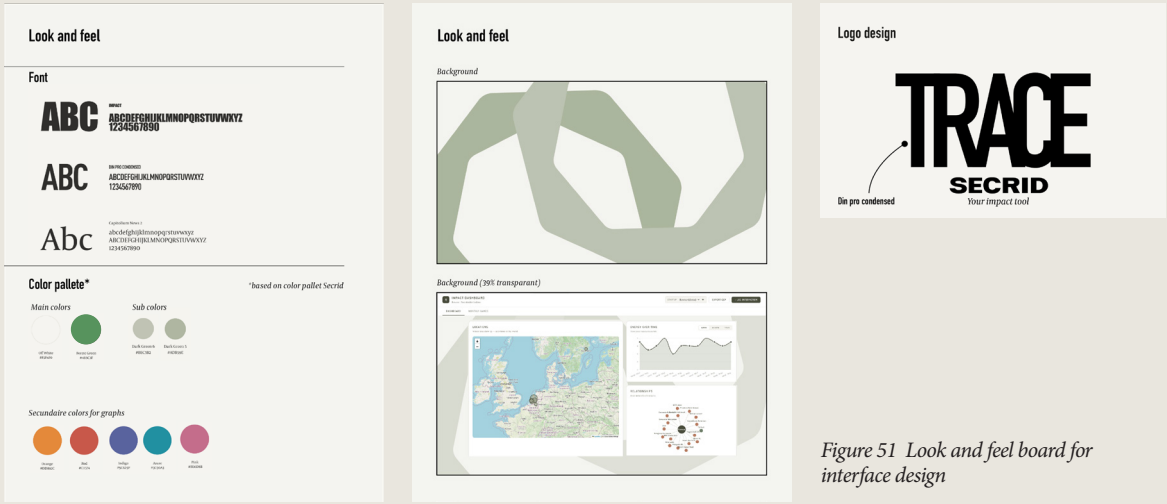



*Figure 51 Look and feel board for interface design*

## 10.6 The implementation of Trace

To ensure implementation, I suggest, together with the Secrid Impact Fund, that the intervention be integrated into the Secrid Impact Fund's year plan, see figure 52. This section sets out how that works across two timelines: the year of a single start-up, and the longer roll-out at Secrid (figure 53).

### 10.6.1 The year of a start-up

The journey begins at the Talent Podium kick-off, where the new start-ups meet in person and mark the start of the fund year. During this kick-off the start-ups play the impact games; the four games map directly onto the logs they will later make in the app, so the kick-off doubles as a warm-up. In the same session they get a short introduction to the app and how they will use it over their year in the Secrid Impact Fund.

From there, the start-ups use the app all year. Each quarter they make a quarterly report, and Secrid asks to see their progress, a gentle push for motivation. One moment stands out: Dutch Design Week, when start-ups build many new connections in a short stretch, so app use is actively encouraged around it.

After four quarters the year closes with a year reflection, bringing the four reports together. From here it is their own choice whether to keep using the app or leave it behind.

### 10.6.2 Multiple year plan Secrid

From Secrid's side, Trace grows over three phases:

*Year 1: Seed*
The first year that Secrid runs Trace is mainly a test year. It is tried out with the current cohort and put under real pressure above all during DDW, when the app is used most intensively. The aim is to learn how it works in practice.

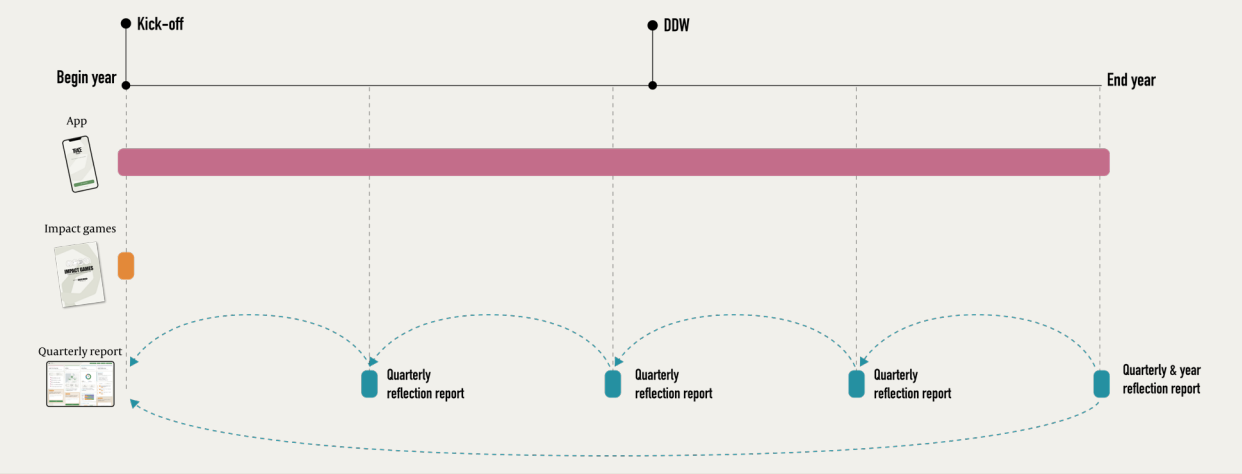



*Figure 52 Year implementation plan*

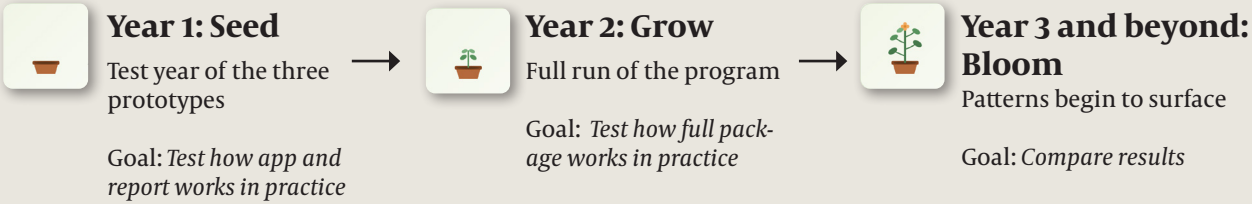



*Figure 53 Multiple year plan Secrid*

*Year 2: Grow*
In the second year the full programme runs from start to finish for the first time. This is where Secrid gains its own insights as a fund: what change do they see in their start-ups with this full program, and how does that shape the impact story the start-ups tell?

*Year 3: Bloom*
From the third year on, the years can be set side by side and patterns begin to surface: what the fund actually contributes to the impact its start-ups make, and what start-ups keep running into during their fund year.

# 11. Evaluation

**Throughout the design process, ideas and prototypes were tested regularly with the start-ups, Secrid, and peers. For the final evaluation, multiple methods were combined. This chapter discusses how I evaluated the final design, Trace, assessed its effectiveness and appropriateness, and identified areas for improvement.**

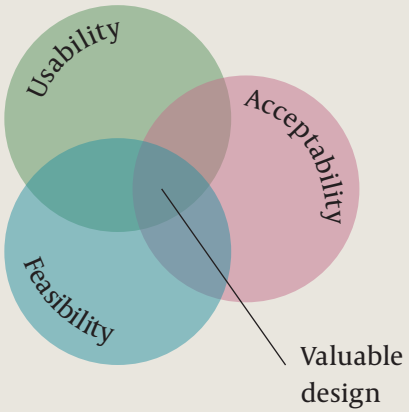



*Figure 54 Innovatie/design-thinking-model (Brown, 2008)*

## 11.1 Goal of the evaluation

Evaluating a design helps to determine whether it has the potential to be effective and whether it is worth realising, and it generates insights for further development and research. The evaluation had two main goals:

- Assess how effective and valuable the design is: will start-ups actually use it, and does it help them create value for their impact story?
- Identify areas for improvement: surface points that could strengthen the design's effectiveness and appropriateness.

To shape the approach and the assessment, a set of criteria was defined along two lines:
Effectiveness: whether the design achieves its intended impact, was assessed through:

- Does it help create a stronger impact story?
- Does it help surface a systemic and strategic impact story?

Valuable: how well the design fits the target group and context, was assessed through (Brown, 2008):

1. **Usability:** is it easy to understand, intuitive, and not overwhelming?
2. **Acceptability:** how does motivation hold up over longer use (two to four weeks)?
3. **Feasibility:** does the design work in the reality of a start-up, and fit their routine and way of working?

Alongside these two criteria, a third lens emerged during the evaluation: transferability, whether the tool also holds value beyond the start-up context it was designed for. This was not a goal of the research, but a session with the Regio Deal Waterwegregio offered a first, informal signal (see 11.3.3).

## 11.2 Approach to Evaluation

The evaluation consisted of three moments: usability interviews with four start-up founders, a two- to four-week test, and a co-creation session in a different context.

### 11.2.1 Usability interview

The first tested the usability and value of the app and the quarterly report. Four start-up founders each worked through both in a one-hour think-aloud session following a strict protocol (see Appendix C.3). Two of them, Angela and Sophie, are mission and product-driven start-up owners comparable to those in the Impact Fund (though not part of it). The other two are founders of start-ups within the Secrid Impact Fund 2026, kept anonymous here. The sessions looked at tree layers: usability, understandability and whether founders recognised the tool's value for their impact story.

### 11.2.2 Four -week user test

The second test captured longer-term results. The prototype was used over four weeks by the start-up, with daily text reminders to sustain logging. After the four weeks we went through the quarterly report generated from all the data gathered, see appendx C.4. It focused on three questions: how motivation holds up over a longer stretch, how valuable the results are at the end, and whether the tool strengthens the impact story. One start-up completed the full four weeks. The other start-ups founders of the secrid impact fund signed up but did not carry out the test. As discussed below, his reasons for dropping off became a valuable insight in their own right.

### 11.2.3 Transferability | Regio Deal Co-creation

This was not a planned part of the research: Trace was designed for start-ups, not the public sector. Through PhD

researcher Juwe, however, I was invited to test the tool with the Regio Deal Waterwegregio, a programme in which municipalities, government, businesses, education, and residents jointly run projects to strengthen the region (RegioDeal, ndt.). In a three-hour session I tested the full package: app, report, and card game, with two of its projects. Like the Secrid Impact Fund, the Regio Deal is a funding body, which made this a valuable, if serendipitous, way to explore whether the tool holds value beyond the start-up context.

## 11.3 Insights of Evaluation

The insights below combine a qualitative analysis of the three evaluation moments. Throughout, a distinction is made between the two interfaces: the app and the quarterly report, because they play very different roles.

### 11.3.1 Effectiveness

**The app**

Logging proved surprisingly engaging: founders consistently wanted to add another entry right after the first, and asked for more functionality rather than less. Its value lies in capturing what founders would otherwise lose in the rush of the day.

"Can I log another partner straight away? — and he does."

**The quarterly report**

This is where the impact story takes shape. In the four-week test the report was a genuine moment of reflection and pride: Sophie was surprised by how much she had done and forgotten. It also gave a systemic and strategic reading of her impact: seeing who she reaches, how her work connects across places and relationships, and how that picture shifts over time, rather than reducing it to one number. That fed straight into strategy: the reach map made Antwerp an emerging hub for new collaborations, and a statistics insight ("we really need to show more statistics") shaped her next pitches.

"This report and reflecting on it, reminds me that I'm living my dream with this start-up."

A limit surfaced too: the value is mostly internal. Translating the story outward remains hard, and founders wanted also audience-specific exports for internal, external, and board use. They need extra support is also translating this into an external impact valuable story.

### 11.3.2 Valuable

**Usability (of the app)**

The onboarding screens were clear and gave a sense of control, and the four log types were well understood. Calendar integration scored extremely high with every participant (Sophie: "her agenda is who she is"; another founder: "amazing functionality"). There is something with agenda's that start-ups are using to help them visually keep the overview and control. The visuals were experienced as playful, even addictive: participants spontaneously played with the network "plant" and the moving dots on the home screen. Overall experience scores were high, with founders giving the experience 5 out of 5. The main friction points were tasks that took more time to logg: the new-beginning question "what changed that made this possible?" was too hard for almost everyone because you have to be reflective at that moment.

"It works really smoothly, it's well thought through."

*Fit to founder role*

An interesting inside was that the four log types are not equally interesting to one founder; which fits best depends on their role. Sophie, the storytelling voice of her team, gravitated to urgency headlines and story sparks, while her co-founder focuses on relations. Also another founder favoured connection and story spark. The tool should flex to the founder rather

"My work is really all about interactions with people. My co-founders is more working on new protoypes"

than treat every log type as equal.

**Usability (of the quarterly report)**
Across the four short sessions and the one long validation, the report's interface was consistently clear and logical to follow: even with a lot of information, the layout helped most founders make sense of the data. The effect was strongest for the founder reviewing her own data, which felt highly recognisable and brought back concrete memories of her logging moments. With mock data, however, the volume was harder to navigate. And in the "Relations" layer in particular, several struggled to distil a clear reflective takeaway.

**Acceptability**
The four-week test showed motivation is fragile and needs scaffolding. Reminders and a personal kick-off were essential. Logging in social settings was a barrier — "logging on your phone right there is antisocial" — and the bounded four-week period helped, where open-ended felt endless. New beginnings and story sparks were hardest, as they live in the moment; Sophie proposed a lock-screen widget and voice memos to capture quickly and work out later.

"Logging on your phone during an networking event is antisocial."

**Feasibility**
In the sessions, founders felt the app would slot neatly into their routine, but the longer test showed this is harder in practice than it looks. Sophie did not always log in the moment, yet thinking in logs changed how she noticed her interactions, giving the tool value beyond the entries themselves. The harder case was the founder who did not use the app for four weeks: he saw its value but found manual logging too time-consuming for his high-volume workflow of twenty or more manufacturer contacts a day, wanting minimal-effort capture that turns into something shareable. In its current form, Trace fits reflective, moderate-volume routines better than high-volume ones.

### 11.3.3 Transferability | Regio Deal
Although never a research goal, the Regio Deal session gave a striking bonus signal: both programmes immediately wanted to bring the tool into their team meetings, enthusiastic about the data: who you speak to, how your topic lives in the world, and that impact is dynamic rather than fixed.

"I want to introduce this in one of my team's meetings."

The most valuable conclusion was about structure. Impact frameworks in the public sector are usually delivered as workshops: costly, dependent on external expertise, and often ineffective, because people would rather get to work themselves. Trace offers that autonomy, and it also makes any follow-up session (such as the quarterly report walkthrough) far more structured, because people arrive with their own data and a clear story of their own. This is a promising, if preliminary, indication that the package could hold value for funders and programmes beyond Secrid.

Taken together, the evaluation shows Trace is an effective and valuable tool: it helps founders reflect on, take pride in, and begin to shape their impact story, while pointing to clear areas for improvement. Although the app felt intuitive and fast for most, start-ups have little time, and even a small log can take real effort. Capture therefore needs to be lighter and fit the moment, with a lower-effort mode for high-volume founders. Translating the report outward also remains a struggle, pointing to a need for audience-specific exports. Finally, the Regio Deal session hinted the tool's value may reach beyond the start-up context. These directions are explored in Chapter 12.2 Recommendations.

# V. CLOSING

*A step back from the design to look at it critically: its limitations, its recommendations, and an overall conclusion. It closes with a personal reflection on a year of designing for something as elusive as impact.*


12 Discussion

13 Reflection


**Phase of chapter**
*Solution*

# 12. Discussion

**This final chapter steps back from the design and looks at it critically. It first examines where the project reaches its limits, in both the research and the design choices, and then sets out recommendations for taking the research and Trace further. It closes by drawing the whole project together in an overall conclusion.**

## 12.1 Limitations

### 12.1.1 Research

The research is bounded in three ways. The first concerns the framework analysis. I reviewed 25 impact frameworks: the ones recurring most in practice and literature, starting from a pool shared by impact researcher Itika Gupta and complemented by my own desk research and expert conversations (§6.1). This kept the analysis grounded, but it is not exhaustive, and the starting point carried whatever emphasis that pool already had.

A second, related boundary is that I largely limited myself to sustainable and social frameworks, matching the focus of the Secrid Impact Fund. Impact clearly extends beyond these, into economic, cultural, governance, health and wellbeing, and technological dimensions among others, so both the analysis and the design that follows are strongest where impact is social or environmental.

The third boundary concerns the exploratory research. The key limitations came entirely from conversations with five start-ups and four funds, nine people in total. As noted in §7.1.4, this small sample (n = 8) constrains generalisability; the findings hold first and foremost for these voices and are meant to sharpen the design direction, not to serve as conclusive evidence. A larger, more varied sample would likely surface additional limitations and sharpen the ones I found.

### 12.1.2 Design

The design remained a prototype, and this shows most in the motivation layer. The app and the quarterly report were worked out in detail and were live online on the start-ups' phones and laptop, but they were not a published app. The start-ups never received "real" notifications from the application, even though notifications are crucial for keeping motivation high.

A second limitation is one of scope, and it is worth naming carefully. By deliberately keeping the project contained, I held myself to the *sender* side of impact: how start-ups measure, assess, and make sense of their own impact. What I did not research is the *receiving* side: how the different stakeholders mapped in §7.5 actually receive that impact story, how tailored it should be to each, and whether those parties are ready for this richer notion of impact at all. This last point is not really a weakness in the project, but a tension it brings to light. Trace goes against the usual way of thinking, where impact has to be turned into money or a single number. Because of that, it is still an open question whether funders, investors, and others are ready to value the richer, fuller story Trace tells. The design therefore supports capturing impact more than communicating it outward, a clear, and I think important, opening for future work.

A third limitation is cultural, and worth naming openly. Trace leans on a certain Dutch directness: it asks founders to be outspoken and to log uncomfortable truths, such as which story did not land. In cultures where people are less inclined to "show the back of their tongue," does the tool still work? This matters because the fund includes start-ups from diverse cultural backgrounds and countries.

### 12.1.3 Evaluations

The main limitation is that none of the Secrid Impact Fund

2026 start-ups tested the prototype over a longer period. The fund had specifically wanted to see how founders respond after around four weeks of use, both as evidence of sustained engagement and as input for implementation. Two start-ups did a shorter test but could not continue, for private reasons or lack of time. The evaluation therefore gives a strong picture of first impressions and usability, but not of how Trace holds attention over weeks for the start-ups of the fund.

A second limitation concerns the testing of the quarterly report. It was tested with real, self-collected data from only one start-up, and only one of its two founders; in the other sessions founders reviewed the report using mock data rather than their own. This means the report's core value, reflecting on a story built from one's own logged moments, was only truly observed once. Trace also imagines the report as a shared ritual that a founding team reflects on together. This important dynamic (how two founders receive and respond to their impact story) was not observed either, and remains open for future testing.

Finally, the transferability signal from the Regio Deal came from a single, unplanned co-creation session rather than a structured study. The enthusiasm there is encouraging, but it should be read as an early indication of wider relevance, not as validated evidence that Trace works beyond the start-up context.

## 12.2 Recommendations

### 12.2.1 Research

To build on the research, future studies could widen the framework analysis in two directions: in breadth, by reviewing frameworks beyond the 25 most-referenced ones, and in scope, by looking beyond the social and sustainable dimensions into economic, cultural, governance, health and wellbeing, and technological ones, among others. This would show whether the gaps found here are specific to social and environmental measurement or more general.

Future research could also draw on a larger and more varied sample, including more start-ups and funds across different sectors, stages, and cultural backgrounds, and a greater number of in-depth interviews to capture a wider range of experiences and perspectives.

### 12.2.2 Design

For the design, the most immediate step is to build and test the motivation layer inside a fully working app, so that real notifications (rather than stand-in WhatsApp reminders) can show whether the mechanisms sustain use over time. The evaluation pointed to concrete refinements alongside this: clearer log types, since founders sometimes struggled to separate an interaction from a story-worthy moment; lower-effort capture, such as a quick voice memo or a mode that batches entries for high-volume users, so Trace fits the moment rather than interrupting it.

Trace's reliance on directness feedback (like someone reacting to your story) could also be tested with founders from cultures where openness is less customary, turning a noted assumption into a designed-for variable.

A richer, more open direction concerns the receiving side of impact. This project focused on the sender: helping start-ups capture and make sense of their own impact, but not on how that story is received. Future research could be done on how the impact story should be framed and tailored to the stakeholders mapped in §7.5, something that also the

start-ups struggled with during the evaluations. Also future research could look into whether those parties are ready for this kind of impact at all. Trace deliberately challenges the logic in which impact is monetised or reduced to a single number, and funders, investors, and other audiences may not yet be ready to value a more complex story. But that is where a long-term transition begins: through the exposure of many applicants, a shared narrative, and ongoing dialogue. Future work could foster that dialogue, treating the tension between today's measurement conventions and this approach not as an obstacle but as the first spark of a slow, worthwhile shift.

#### 12.2.3 Evaluations

The most valuable next step would be to run the longer test that did not happen here: future evaluation could follow the 2026 start-ups over four weeks or more, to show how Trace performs once novelty fades and to inform decisions on implementation. To guard against drop-out, such a study could recruit more participants than strictly needed and lower the per-session time commitment, since time scarcity and private circumstances undermined the test this time.

The quarterly report also needs a fuller test. Here it was reviewed with real, self-collected data by only one founder. A future evaluation should test the report with several start-ups using their own logged data, and with both co-founders reflecting on it together, as Trace intends it as a shared ritual.

Finally, the transferability signal from the Regio Deal came from a single, unplanned session. A structured study with programmes beyond start-ups: funds and other impact-driven organisations, would test how far the approach really travels outside the context it was designed for.

### 12.3 Conclusion

The main goal of this project was to explore how early-stage, mission-driven start-ups can be supported in assessing and communicating their impact in a way that fits their context and development stage. This question emerged from a recurring tension within the Secrid Impact Fund: the start-ups it supports are working toward broad societal and sustainable transitions, yet the tools available to make that work visible were built for a very different kind of organisation.

The research confirmed and sharpened that tension. Start-ups do want to understand and communicate their impact, but the established frameworks they reach for do not fit them. Five limitations emerged consistently across the literature and the interviews: existing frameworks fail to capture qualitative and narrative impact, they are overwhelming and exhausting, they are not fit for the early-stage and experimental nature of these ventures, they are not embedded in daily practice, and they insufficiently capture systemic and strategic impact. Underneath all five sat a single insight that runs through the whole project: existing frameworks privilege what is countable over what is meaningful.

This led to the design of Trace, an impact companion that travels with a venture across its year in the Secrid Impact Fund. Rather than a single report or metric, Trace is a package of three parts with different rhythms: an app at its heart, through which founders capture small moments of impact as they happen; a quarterly report that turns those moments into structured reflection; and a set of impact games that open the year with a shared language. Together they were designed as a direct answer to the five limitations:

- Instead of forcing everything into numbers, the app captures qualitative and narrative impact directly, through emotions, reactions, relationships and stories, while the patterns that accumulate over time and the quarterly report add a quantitative reading on top. Impact becomes visible in both registers at once.
- Instead of being overwhelming and exhausting, each log is completed in under a minute, the lay-out is simple and clear, and nothing is mandatory or done in order.
- Instead of assuming stable products and mature data, Trace is built for the early-stage and experimental nature of these ventures: it captures emergent moments, fresh beginnings and unexpected sparks rather than predefined indicators.
- Instead of being pulled out only for accountability moments, Trace is embedded in daily practice, used a minute at a time across twelve months, so that impact becomes a steering mechanism rather than a separate task.
- And instead of flattening system change into linear output, the four loggs and the quarterly report are grounded in systemic-change theory, so that Trace can begin to capture the systemic and strategic impact that conventional frameworks miss.

Returning to the literature, the four loggs were built to make the four core practices of systemic design (Goss et al., 2026) visible in the everyday work of a founder. Log the interaction draws on building relations, Urgency headline and Story spark on framing complexity, and New begin on meaningful form-giving; the fourth practice, nurturing reflexivity, is carried by the reflective form of New begin and, above all, by the quarterly report. What started in Chapter 5 as an observation: that these practices are already partly present in the work of mission-driven start-ups even when unnamed, becomes in Trace a set of concrete touchpoints that give founders the language and the tools to recognise and sharpen them.

Trace also answers the gap identified in the Impact Logic Matrix. The analysis showed that existing frameworks are strong at either evidence-driven external legitimacy or narrative-oriented internal alignment, but rarely combine them. Trace was deliberately designed to sit in the space they leave open (see figure 55): it helps founders reflect internally and align on their own direction, while at the same time building the credible, evidence-backed story they need for funders, partners and the outside world. It is both narrative and evidence-driven, both internally and externally oriented.

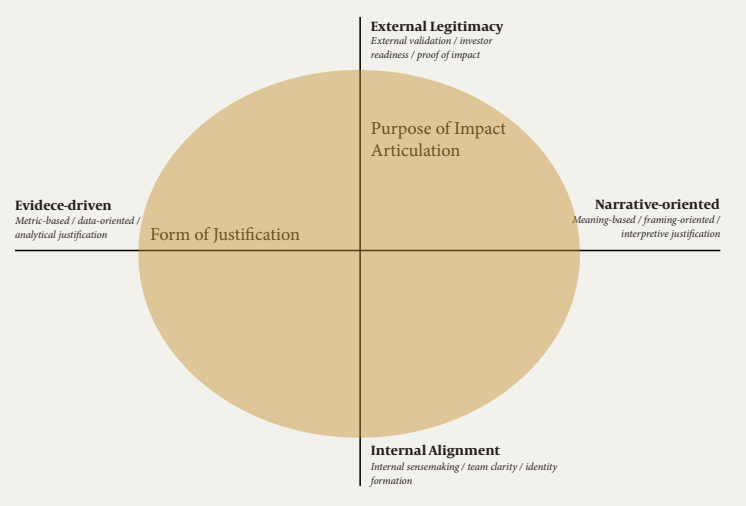



*Figure 55 Filled gap in the matrix*

Most importantly, this is where the project makes its central argument, drawing the matrix and Meadows' leverage points together. Meadows reminds us that if we want to change a system, we do not get there by focusing on numbers and parameters; the most consequential leverage lies higher up, in relations, goals and mindsets. Existing frameworks value what is countable over what is meaningful, and that is exactly why they stay stuck at the shallow begin of the leverage model: they measure well, but they come from a different way of thinking. The world still runs on the accountability of numbers, and that demand is real and cannot simply be ignored. What Trace does is turn the order around. It does not start from the numbers; it starts from what matters (from relationships, from framing, from turning points, from the stories that land) and only then adds numbers and patterns to them (see figure 56). And because the numbers and patterns Trace looks for come from a different, more systemic way of thinking, they stay useful for the accountability the world asks for, while still pointing to the deeper leverage where real systemic change actually happens.

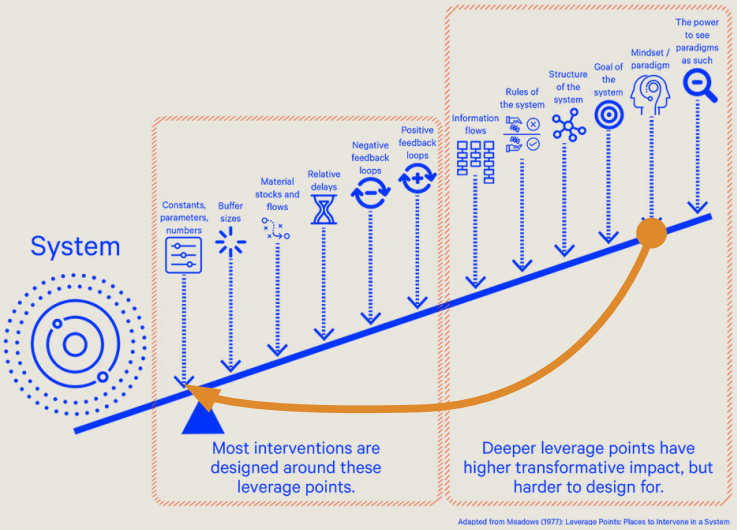



*Figure 56 How Trace moves within the Meadows leverage model*

The evaluation showed that this approach resonates. In the usability sessions, founders engaged with Trace immediately: one logged a moment and wanted to add another straight away. Also in the longer test the quarterly report proved its worth by letting a founder rediscover achievements she had forgotten and feel real pride in how far her venture had come. Strikingly, the mission-driven organisations of the Regio Deal Waterwegregio responded with the same enthusiasm, wanting to bring Trace into their own teams. What they valued most was exactly what the design set out to make visible: who a venture speaks to, how its topic lives in the world, and the fact that impact is dynamic and changes over time. Above all, they described Trace as offering something existing approaches did not: structure. The evaluation was equally honest about where the tool still falls short. Motivation to log depends heavily on well-timed reminders, some of the most meaningful moments are hard to capture in the middle of the action, and founders with a high volume of daily interactions need a much lower-effort way to record them. These findings translated into clear recommendations for refining the design and into directions for future development, including the possibility of adapting the package for programmes and participants beyond individual start-ups.

Ultimately, this project shows that supporting early-stage impact is less a measurement problem than a translation one: helping founders move between what is meaningful to them and what is legible to the world around them. By starting from meaning and only then reaching for the numbers, a tool can honour the accountability the world asks for while staying true to the systemic, emergent nature of what these ventures do. I hope it inspires further exploration into how impact can be assessed and communicated from a systemic mental model, so that what is meaningful no longer has to be sacrificed to what is countable.

# 13. Reflection

**This chapter looks back on the jour-ney rather than the outcome. Along-side the design itself, this project was a year of learning: about wor-king with an organisation like the Secrid Impact Fund, about designing together with start-ups, about what it means to design for something as elusive as impact, and about myself as a designer. The reflections that follow trace those four threads.**

## 13.1 Working together with Secrid Impact Fund

Working with the Secrid Impact Fund was, quite simply, a wonderful place to be. What fascinated me most was being allowed to witness the things that usually stay behind the scenes: the selection process, and the way the Fund manages, year after year, to attract such strong and exciting start-ups. I was just as drawn to their PR and to the care they put into helping each start-up get its story right. Watching that up close taught me a great deal about how impact is not only created, but also told.

The collaboration unfolded organically. From early on I felt like part of the organisation rather than a visiting student, taken along in almost everything. At some point the rela-tion-ship even turned around, and my perspective and ideas became genuinely valuable to the Fund itself. Because the Fund is relatively small, an extra pair of eyes mattered, and I could give something back: insights into the systemic charac-ter of the impact it supports, and into how its own phases of guiding start-ups take shape. Being seen in that way, the way Marianne and René tend to see the people around them, made the whole project feel like a shared effort rather than a solo assignment.

The single most valuable moment of the entire graduation came at the kick-off of the 2026 cohort, when I was given half an hour with each start-up to test my prototypes. That op-por-tunity became one of the cornerstones of this project, and I am deeply grateful to Secrid for making it possible. It is rare, as a graduating student, to be handed that much trust and access, and it shaped not only my research but also the way I now think about where I want to build my career.

## 13.2 Working with Start-ups

Working with the start-ups was easily one of the most re-ward-ing parts of this project. They are enthusiastic, driven people who were remarkably open to my research, and who remain open to so much in general. Their energy was addict-ing: the meetings with founders were the moments I genuine-ly looked forward to, the ones I knew would leave me ener-gised rather than drained.

At the same time, working so closely with them was not always light. There were moments when I felt something close to hopelessness, and even sadness, about the situation these start-ups are in. They want so badly to bring about change, yet they remain deeply dependent on money and funding. Those funds are in turn steered by large financial organisations that effectively decide which forms of impact get invested in. See-ing that from up close, I came to understand how much of the impact landscape is also a question of power, and how easily the most meaningful but least measurable forms of change can fall outside what gets funded. This tension is exactly what my project tries to address, but living it through the founders' eyes made it far more real than any framework could.
The hardest practical part of working with start-ups was simply how little time they have. Keeping in close contact was sometimes difficult, and only a few founders had the room to test my final prototype over a longer stretch. If I were to do this again, I would build those longer testing commitments in earlier, while there is still time and attention to give them.

## 13.3 Designing for Impact

Designing for impact, and especially researching it, turned out to be extremely difficult. Impact is an enormous web of definitions, perspectives, and ideas, and it became clear early on that I would not find one neat, groundbreaking answer to pin it down. That realisation changed my approach: instead of only reading, I decided to talk to as many people as I could. I spent a full day at the Triodos impact fair, listening to lectures and stories from companies, writers, and entrepreneurs, purely to hear how people talk about impact. Alongside this I read widely, including Doughnut Economics, Maakkracht, and Mijn Impactgids, to see how differently impact is described depending on who is holding the pen.

I also moved into systems thinking and the systemic design tradition within IDE. This was an entirely new landscape for me, and it proved to be just as complex as impact itself. Finding direction within it was genuinely hard: conversations with PhD researchers and other experts helped, but it is still a developing field where very little is fixed, which made it all the more difficult to form a clear picture of where my own work fitted in.

And yet, this is where I found the most joy. I loved the litera-ture research within systems thinking, and it has become a field I am now deeply interested in, to the point where I start-ed seeing almost everything around me as a system. More than anything, this part of the project gave me knowledge I know I will carry far beyond this thesis.

## 13.4 My own process

On a personal level, the hardest part of this project was working alone. This is the largest project I have ever done entirely by myself, and I found that surprisingly confronting. I have never been so unsure of myself at certain decision-making moments, never so aware that my own opinion and confi-dence alone were not quite enough to settle them.

If working alone taught me anything, it is how much energy I draw from other people. The moments I came alive were the ones spent with others: meeting the start-ups, brainstorming with colleagues, talking things through with fellow students. Those were the moments I flourished. For me, sharing research and sharing a thought is the most valuable thing there is; without it, an idea often feels like nothing more than a thought trapped inside my own head.

I leave this project knowing myself a little better as a designer. I now understand that collaboration is not a nice extra for me, but a real source of strength, and it is something I want to seek out deliberately in whatever comes next. This year changed where I want to go, and a large part of that is realis-ing the kind of environment, and the kind of people, I want to keep designing alongside.

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# APPENDIX

## A. Researching impact

A.1 Analysis of frameworks

A.2 Comparing frameworks

A.3 Cross-framework inventory excel

A.4 Interview protocol and questions

## B. Ideation

B.1 Three exploration brainstorm

B.2 Ideation framework

B.3 Co-creation sessions + results

B.4 The 48 prototypes

B.5 C-BOX

B.6 Clustering ideas

B.7 Six prototypes

B.8 Testing protocol per start-up

B.9 Qualitative and Quantitative results

## C. Final design

C.1 Quarterly report data analysis

C.2 Physical report

C.3 Impact Games

C.4  Interview protocol Usability interview

C.5 Interview protocol four week usability interview

# A.1 Analysis of frameworks

**1. Linear change vs System change**

Some linear frameworks believe in predictable, linear paths. Inputs lead to outputs. Outcomes lead to outcomes. And outcomes lead to impact. Other frameworks assume change is nonlinear, adaptive, systematic and emergent. They recognize feedback loops, unintended consequences and shifting dynamics.

They clash between the one seeks for control and the other accepts contribution and emergence.

**2. Quantification vs. Qualification (meaning)**

Some frameworks priotize numerical representation. They assume impact must be quantified to be credible

Others priotize lived experiences, narratives, and qualitive depth. Value can not be reduced to numbers.

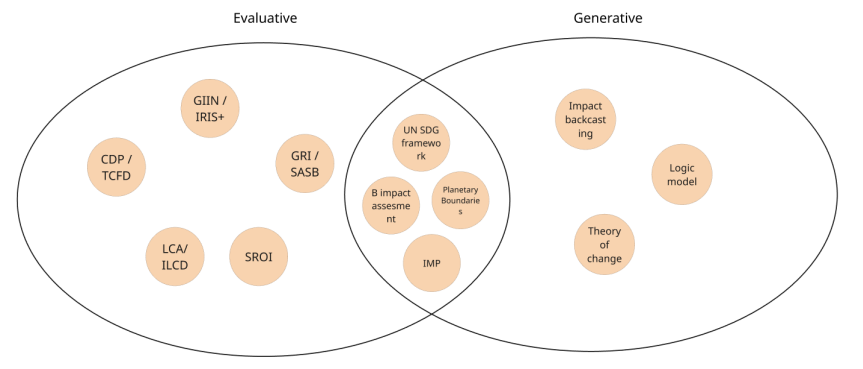
**3. Control vs. Emergence**
Some frameworks assume that outcomes can be designed, managed and predicted, other assume that outcomes emergence through interaction, expertimentation and adaption.

There are control systems and sensing-and-adapting systems.

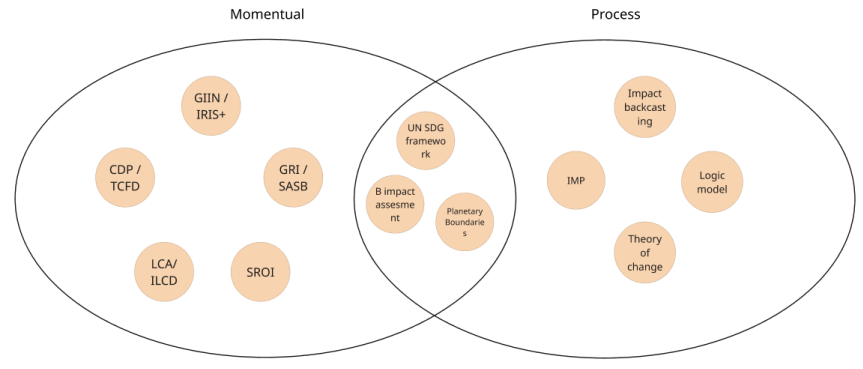
**4. Short-term accountability vs. long-term transformation (system change)**
Some frameworks are built reporting cycles, quaterly disclosures, and annual budgets.
Others are built around generation change, ecological limitsm and structural transformation.
The contradition lies in the mismatch between measurement timelines and systemic change timelines.

## A.2 Comparing frameworks

### Evaluative vs. generative




### Momentual vs. process

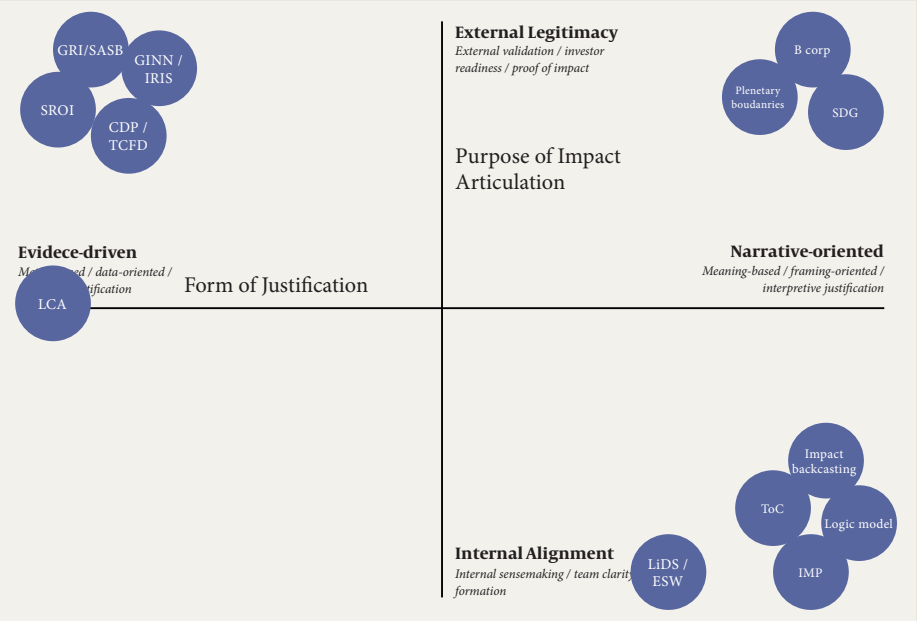



## A.3 Cross-framework inventory excel

The excel where the 9 quantitive frameworks: ReCiPe, ILCD, SABS, GIIN, SROI, B Impact, CDP, GRI and TCFD their metrics are combined, defined and counted.

| Meetschemite | Samengevoegde metric | Betekenis / wat meet het? | Type | Eenheid / typische eenheden | Plot-bucket | ReCiPe (LCA) | ILCD (LCA) | SASB | GIIN / IRIS+ | SROI | B Impact / B Corp | CDP | GRI | TCFD | # frameworks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E-001 | Climate change / carbon footprint | Measures total climate impact or greenhouse gas burden. | Quantitatief | tCO2e / kg CO2e / yr per kg CO2 | Environment | Y | Y | Y | Y | | Y | Y | Y | Y | 8 |
| E-002 | Biodiversity / habitat impact or restoration | Effect on species, habitats, ecosystems or restoration outcomes. | Gemengd | ha / number of sites / species-yr / n.v.t. | Environment | Y | Y | Y | Y | | Y | Y | Y | | 7 |
| E-003 | Emissions reduced / avoided | Emissions prevented, reduced or avoided versus a baseline. | Quantitatief | tCO2e avoided or reduced | Environment | | | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 7 |
| E-004 | Land use / land transformation | Area occupied, transformed or managed, and related ecosystem impact. | Quantitatief | m2a crop eq / ha / m2 year | Environment | Y | Y | Y | Y | | Y | Y | Y | | 7 |
| E-005 | Water consumption | Net water consumed and not returned to the same catchment. | Quantitatief | m3 / ML / yr per m3 water | Environment | Y | | Y | Y | | Y | Y | Y | | 6 |
| E-006 | Water pollutant emissions (N / P / COD / toxics) | Polluting releases to water bodies including nutrients and toxic substances. | Quantitatief | kg / tons / kg N eq / kg P eq | Environment | Y | Y | Y | Y | | | Y | Y | | 6 |
| E-007 | Water withdrawal | Water abstracted from surface, groundwater, seawater or third parties. | Quantitatief | m3 / ML / yr per m3 water | Environment | Y | | Y | Y | | Y | Y | Y | | 6 |
| E-008 | Climate targets | Formal climate or emissions-reduction targets and progress against them. | Gemengd | % reduction / target year / n.v.t. | Environment | | | Y | | | Y | Y | Y | Y | 5 |
| E-009 | Energy use | Total energy consumed in operations or value chain. | Quantitatief | kWh / MWh / GJ | Environment | | | Y | Y | | Y | Y | Y | | 5 |
| E-010 | Forest / deforestation exposure | Exposure to forest-risk commodities or deforestation-related impacts. | Gemengd | ha / % traceable / n.v.t. | Environment | | | Y | Y | | Y | Y | Y | | 5 |
| E-011 | GHG intensity | Emissions relative to activity, revenue, product, employee or output. | Quantitatief | tCO2e/€ revenue; tCO2e/unit; tCO2e/FTE | Environment | | | Y | Y | | | Y | Y | Y | 5 |
| E-012 | Renewable energy share / generation | Share of renewable energy used or renewable energy generated. | Quantitatief | % / MWh | Environment | | | Y | Y | | Y | Y | Y | | 5 |
| E-013 | Scope 1 GHG emissions | Direct emissions from owned or controlled sources. | Quantitatief | tCO2e | Environment | | | Y | | | Y | Y | Y | Y | 5 |
| E-014 | Scope 2 GHG emissions | Indirect emissions from purchased electricity, heat, steam or cooling. | Quantitatief | tCO2e | Environment | | | Y | tCO2e | | Y | Y | Y | Y | 5 |
| E-015 | Scope 3 GHG emissions | Other indirect value-chain emissions upstream and downstream. | Quantitatief | tCO2e | Environment | | | Y | | | Y | Y | Y | Y | 5 |
| E-016 | Water discharge / effluent | Water returned to the environment, including effluents. | Quantitatief | m3 / ML | Environment | | | Y | Y | | Y | Y | Y | | 5 |
| E-017 | Water recycled / reused | Water reused in processes or recycled within operations. | Quantitatief | m3 / % | Environment | | | Y | Y | | Y | Y | Y | | 5 |
| E-019 | Air pollutant emissions (NOx / SOx / PM / VOC) | Air emissions other than GHGs that affect emg, health or ecosystems. | Quantitatief | kg / tons / kg NOx eq / kg PM2.5 eq | Environment | Y | Y | Y | | | | | Y | | 4 |
| E-020 | Climate transition plan | Plan to align strategy and operations with climate goals. | Kwalitatief | n.v.t. | Environment | | | Y | | | Y | Y | | Y | 4 |
| E-021 | Material use / circularity / recycled content | Use of raw materials and how circular or recycled they are. | Quantitatief | kg / metric tons / % recycled content | Environment | | | Y | Y | | Y | | Y | | 4 |
| E-022 | Waste generated | Total waste generated by operations or product system. | Quantitatief | kg / metric tons | Environment | | | Y | Y | | Y | | Y | | 4 |
| E-023 | Waste recycled / diverted | Waste diverted from disposal via recycling, reuse or recovery. | Quantitatief | kg / metric tons / % | Environment | | | Y | Y | | Y | | Y | | 4 |
| E-024 | Wastewater treated | Volume of wastewater treated, reused or safely discharged. | Quantitatief | m3 | Environment | | | Y | Y | | | Y | Y | | 4 |
| E-028 | Climate risks & opportunities | Identification of material climate-related risks and opportunities. | Kwalitatief | n.v.t. | Environment | | | Y | | | | Y | | Y | 3 |
| E-029 | Internal carbon price | Internal price used to value carbon in decisions or scenario work. | Quantitatief | currency per tCO2e | Environment | | | Y | | | | Y | | Y | 3 |
| E-030 | Ozone depletion | Potential to degrade the stratospheric ozone layer. | Quantitatief | kg CFC-11 eq / yr per kg CFC11 | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | Y | | 3 |
| E-031 | Scenario analysis / climate resilience | Use of climate scenarios to test resilience of strategy or portfolio. | Kwalitatief | n.v.t. | Environment | | | Y | | | | Y | | Y | 3 |
| E-032 | Soil pollution / contamination | Releases to soil or contamination affecting land quality and toxicity. | Quantitatief | kg pollutant / toxicity equivalents | Environment | Y | Y | Y | | | | | | | 3 |
| E-033 | Water stress exposure | Operations, asset or withdrawals located in water-stressed areas. | Gemengd | % sites / % withdrawal / n.v.t. | Environment | | | Y | | | | Y | Y | | 3 |
| E-048 | Acidification | kg SO2 eq / mol H+ eq / species-yr per kg | Quantitatief | | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E-049 | Ecotoxicity | CTUe / kg 1,4-DCB eq / species-yr | Quantitatief | | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E-050 | Eutrophication - freshwater | kg P eq / species-yr per kg P | Quantitatief | | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E-051 | Eutrophication - marine | kg N eq / species-yr per kg N | Quantitatief | | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E-052 | Fine particulate matter formation / respiratory | kg PM2.5 eq / yr per kg PM2.5 | Quantitatief | | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E-053 | Hazardous waste | Hazardous waste generated, stored, transported or treated. | Quantitatief | kg / metric tons | Environment | | | Y | | | | | Y | | 2 |
| E-054 | Human health damage endpoint | LCA endpoint damage to human health from multiple environmental | Quantitatief | DALY / yr | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E-055 | Human toxicity - cancer | Potential human-health damage from carcinogenic toxic releases. | Quantitatief | kg 1,4-DCB eq / CTUh / yr per kg 1,4-DCB | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E-056 | Human toxicity - non-cancer | Potential human-health damage from non-carcinogenic toxic releases. | Quantitatief | kg 1,4-DCB eq / CTUh / yr per kg 1,4-DCB | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E-057 | Ionising radiation | Potential impacts from ionising radiation on health and environment. | Quantitatief | kBq Co-60 eq / kBq U235 eq / yr per kBq | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E-058 | Photochemical ozone formation / smog | Potential to form ground-level ozone that affects health and ecosystems. | Quantitatief | kg NOx eq / kg NMVOC eq / yr per kg NOx | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E-059 | Resource scarcity - fossils | Scarcity or depletion pressure on fossil energy resources. | Quantitatief | MJ / surplus cost / $ per kg crude oil / | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E-060 | Resource scarcity - minerals / metals | Scarcity or depletion pressure on mineral and metal resources. | Quantitatief | kg Sb eq / surplus cost / $ per kg Cu | Environment | Y | Y | | | | | | | | 2 |
| E-067 | Ecosystem quality - freshwater | Damage to freshwater ecosystems over time. | Quantitatief | species-yr / PDF·m3·yr | Environment | Y | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| E-068 | Ecosystem quality - marine | Damage to marine ecosystems over time. | Quantitatief | species-yr / PDF·m3·yr | Environment | Y | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| E-069 | Ecosystem quality - terrestrial | Damage to land ecosystems over time. | Quantitatief | species-yr / PDF·m2·yr | Environment | Y | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| S-018 | Training hours / skills development | Learning, skilling or capacity-building provided to workers or beneficiaries. | Quantitatief | hours / participants / % trained | Social | | | Y | Y | Y | Y | | Y | | 5 |
| S-026 | Community engagement / impact assessments | How far the company engages communities and performs social impact | Gemengd | % operations / number / n.v.t. | Social | | | | Y | Y | Y | | Y | | 4 |
| S-027 | Employees / FTE | Workforce size in headcount or full-time equivalents. | Quantitatief | headcount / FTE | Social | | | Y | Y | | Y | | Y | | 4 |
| S-034 | Access to essential services | Improved access to healthcare, housing, finance, education, energy, water | Quantitatief | number of beneficiaries / % access | Social | | | | Y | Y | Y | | | | 3 |
| S-035 | Beneficiaries reached / customers served | People, households or customers reached with a product, service or | Quantitatief | number of people / households / | Social | | | | Y | Y | Y | | | | 3 |
| S-036 | Customer / beneficiary satisfaction | Perceived satisfaction, trust or service quality among customers or | Quantitatief | score / % satisfied | Social | | | | Y | Y | Y | | | | 3 |
| S-037 | Employee turnover / retention | Rate of workers leaving or being retained. | Quantitatief | % / retention rate | Social | | | Y | | | Y | | Y | | 3 |
| S-038 | Gender pay gap / pay equity | Difference in pay by gender or progress toward equal pay. | Quantitatief | % gap / ratio | Social | | | Y | | | Y | | Y | | 3 |
| S-039 | Human rights due diligence | Whether the company identifies, prevents and mitigates human-rights risks. | Kwalitatief | n.v.t. | Social | | | Y | | | Y | | Y | | 3 |
| S-040 | Human rights incidents / grievances | Reported human-rights incidents, complaints or grievance cases. | Quantitatief | number of incidents / grievances | Social | | | Y | | | Y | | Y | | 3 |
| S-041 | Jobs created | New jobs generated through the company, project or intervention. | Quantitatief | number of jobs | Social | | | | Y | Y | Y | | | | 3 |
| S-042 | Leadership / board diversity | Diversity of management or governance bodies. | Quantitatief | % by category | Social | | | Y | | | Y | | Y | | 3 |
| S-043 | Living wage / minimum wage coverage | Extent to which workers receive at least a minimum or living wage. | Quantitatief | % employees / yes-no | Social | | | | Y | | Y | | Y | | 3 |
| S-044 | Supplier screening / responsible sourcing | Screening or due diligence of suppliers on social/environmental criteria. | Gemengd | % suppliers screened / n.v.t. | Social | | | Y | | | Y | | Y | | 3 |
| S-045 | Work-related fatalities | Deaths caused by work-related injury or illness. | Quantitatief | number of fatalities | Social | | | Y | | | Y | | Y | | 3 |
| S-046 | Worker health & safety incident rate | Frequency of recordable injuries or safety incidents. | Quantitatief | rate / LTIFR / TRIR | Social | | | Y | | | Y | | Y | | 3 |
| S-047 | Workforce diversity | Diversity of employees by gender, age or underrepresented group. | Quantitatief | % by category | Social | | | Y | | | Y | | Y | | 3 |
| S-061 | Anti-corruption incidents / fines | Bribery, corruption cases, convictions or fines. | Quantitatief | number / currency | Social | | | | | | Y | | Y | | 2 |
| S-062 | Collective bargaining / worker voice | Coverage of collective bargaining, worker committees or voice mechanisms. | Gemengd | % covered / n.v.t. | Social | | | | | | Y | | Y | | 2 |
| S-063 | Jobs maintained / preserved | Existing jobs retained or protected because of the activity. | Quantitatief | number of jobs | Social | | | | Y | Y | | | | | 2 |
| S-064 | Number/value of loans or investments to target groups | Capital provided to underserved groups, impact projects or targeted | Quantitatief | number / € / $ | Social | | | | Y | | Y | | | | 2 |
| S-065 | Outcome depth / degree of change by people and | How much change beneficiaries experience, not just how many are reached. | Gemengd | % change / score change / narrative | Social | | | | Y | Y | | | | | 2 |
| S-066 | Wellbeing / quality of life change | Change in wellbeing, quality of life or user outcome after intervention. | Gemengd | survey score / % change / narrative | Social | | | | Y | Y | | | | | 2 |
| S-070 | Contribution / attribution | Share of the observed outcome that can reasonably be linked to the | Gemengd | % attributed / narrative | Social | | | | | Y | | | | | 1 |
| S-071 | Deadweight / displacement / drop-off | SROI adjustment factors for what would happen anyway, what is displaced, | Quantitatief | % | Social | | | | | Y | | | | | 1 |
| S-072 | Financial proxies / monetized value | Monetary valuation assigned to social or environmental outcomes. | Quantitatief | € / $ / present value | Social | | | | | Y | | | | | 1 |
| S-073 | Outcome duration | How long an outcome lasts once it has been created. | Quantitatief | months / years | Social | | | | | Y | | | | | 1 |
| S-074 | SROI ratio | Value created per unit of investment, expressed as a return ratio. | Quantitatief | x:1 or € value per € invested | Social | | | | | Y | | | | | 1 |
| S-075 | Stakeholder governance / mission lock | Formal governance mechanisms to protect mission and stakeholder | Kwalitatief | n.v.t. | Social | | | | | | Y | | | | 1 |

## A.4 Matrix with legend of names




| Legend Term | Full name |
|---|---|
| B Corp | *Certified B Corporation* |
| CDP | *Carbon Disclosure Project* |
| ESW | *EcoDesign Strategy Wheel* |
| GIIN | *Global Impact Investing Network Global Reporting Initiative* |
| GRI | *Impact Management Project* |
| IMP | *Impact Reporting and Investment Standards* |
| IRIS+ | *Life Cycle Assessment* |
| LCA | *Life cycle Design Strategies* |
| LiDS | *Sustainability Accounting Standards Board* |
| SASB | *Sustainable Development Goal* |
| SDG | *Social Return on Investment* |
| SROI | *Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures* |
| TCFD | *Theory of Change* |
| ToC | |

## A.4 Interview protocol and questions

**Introduction**
Thank you for taking the time to participate in this semi-structured interview. My name is Nora, and I am currently conducting my graduation research at TU Delft in collaboration with the Secrid Impact Fund.

The aim of this research is to explore how the impact of early- to mid-stage, design-driven start-ups can be understood, monitored, and communicated in a meaningful way. In particular, this research looks at the opportunities and limitations of existing impact assessment approaches for start-ups.

This interview is intended to provide insight into your experiences, perspectives, and practices related to impact: how you define it, how you currently assess or communicate it, which challenges you encounter, and what kinds of support or tools might be helpful. Because this is a semi-structured interview, I have prepared a number of guiding questions, while also leaving room to follow relevant topics that may emerge during the conversation.

Your responses will be treated confidentially and anonymised in the final thesis unless explicitly agreed otherwise. With your permission, I would like to record this interview for transcription purposes. The recording will only be used for research and transcription, and will be deleted after the anonymised transcript has been completed.
I also have a consent form for you to read and sign before we begin.
The interview will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes.
Before we begin, do you have any questions?

**1. Warming-up**
- Could you briefly tell me about your start-up as it exists today?
- At what stage do you see the company right now?

**2. Where is your impact?**
This section explores how the start-up itself understands impact.
- What does impact mean to you?
- What kind of impact do you believe your start-up creates?
- Would you describe your impact as mainly social, environmental, or both?
- What kind of change are you hoping to create in the longer term?

**3. Do you already measure impact?**
This section looks at whether and how they currently assess impact.
- Are you currently measuring impact in any way?
- What are important moments for you to measure and/or communicate impact?
- What kinds of signals, indicators, or feedback do you use?

**4. Challenges in measuring and communicating impact**
This is the core section for understanding the limitations they experience.
- What challenges do you encounter when it comes to measuring impact?
- What challenges do you encounter when communicating impact?

**5. Stakeholders / external communication**
This section focuses on who asks for impact evidence and what they want to see.
- For whom would you want to measure or communicate your impact externally?
- Which stakeholders ask you for impact information?
- What do these different stakeholders want to know or see?

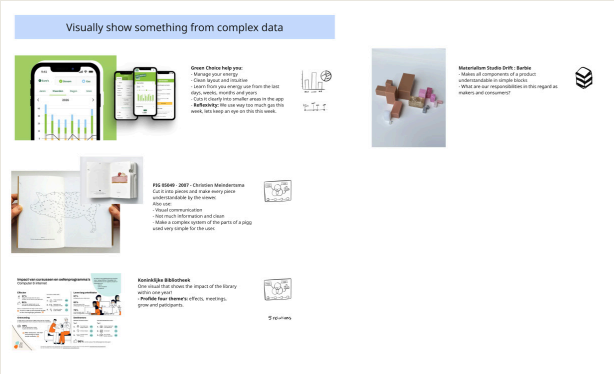
**6. Closing reflection**
- Is there anything important about impact in your start-up that we have not discussed yet?
- What would help you most in understanding, monitoring, or communicating your impact better?

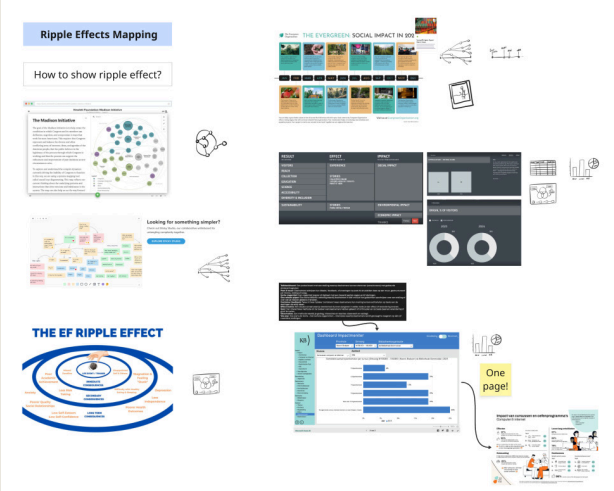
## B.1 Three exploration brainstorm

### Exploration 1 - How can a tool feel light rather than overwhelming?

### Exploration 2— How can qualitative and narrative impact be captured quickly?

### Exploration 3 — How can a tool fit the experimental, in-progress nature of early-stage work?



## B.2 Ideation framework

### Designing Capture Moments for Start-ups

#### INPUT

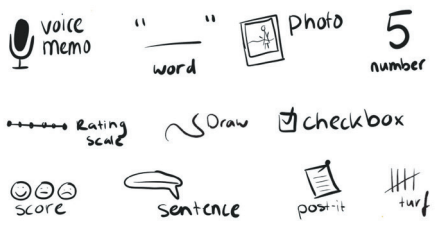
1

Choose one of the recurring activities of the start-up:

- 9 o'clock coffee moment with the whole team
- Answering client and partner emails
- Working on prototypes
- Checking and paying invoices
- Lunch with the team
- Tracking the project
- Visiting partners at an external location
- Meeting with a client about material research
- Attending a sustainability event
- Own idea: _____

2

Choose a capture tool:




#### OUTPUT

3a

What is going to be captured?

Name activity:

3b

What is going to be captured?

Name activity:

#### REFLECTION

4a

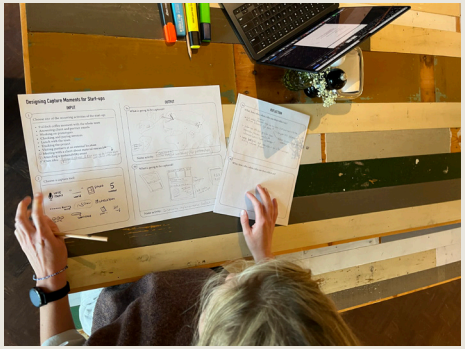
What, how, who, when, why can they reflect on?

4b

What, how, who, when, why can they reflect on?

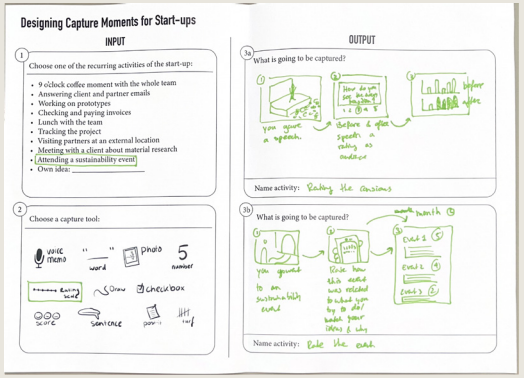
## B.3 Co-creation sessions + results

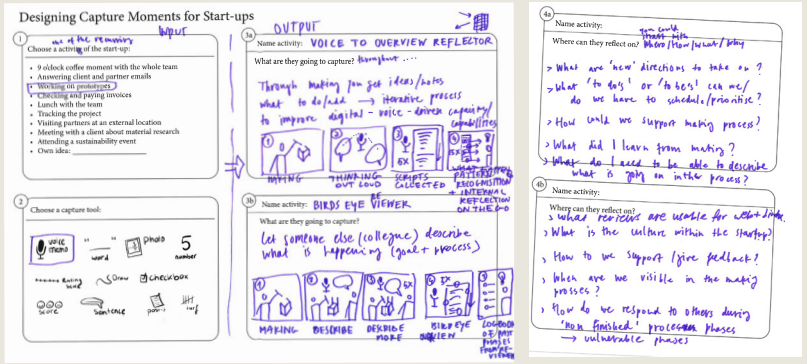
### Photo's co-creations

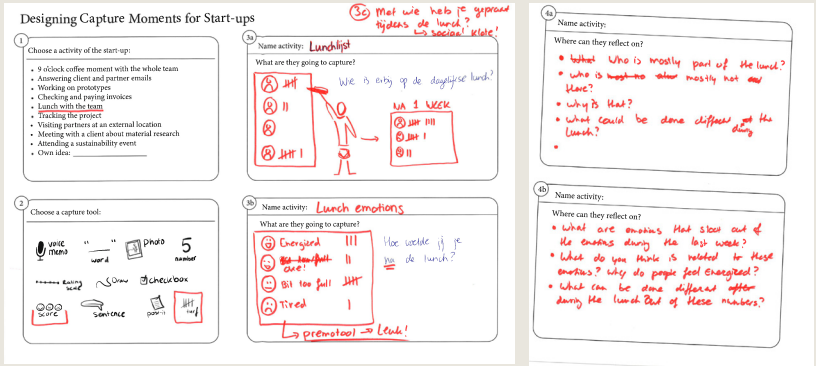


### Results co-creations

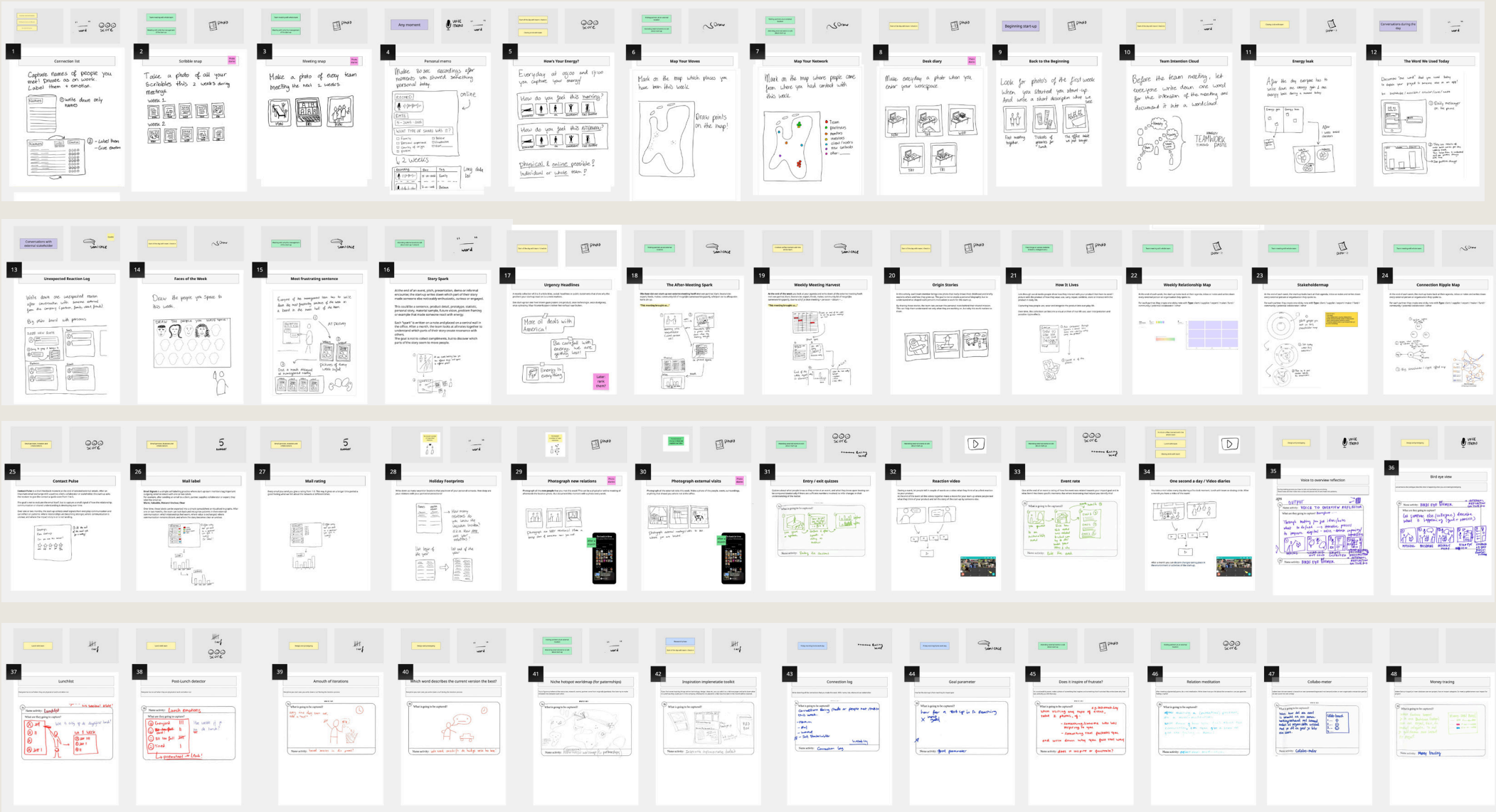
Three of the co-creation



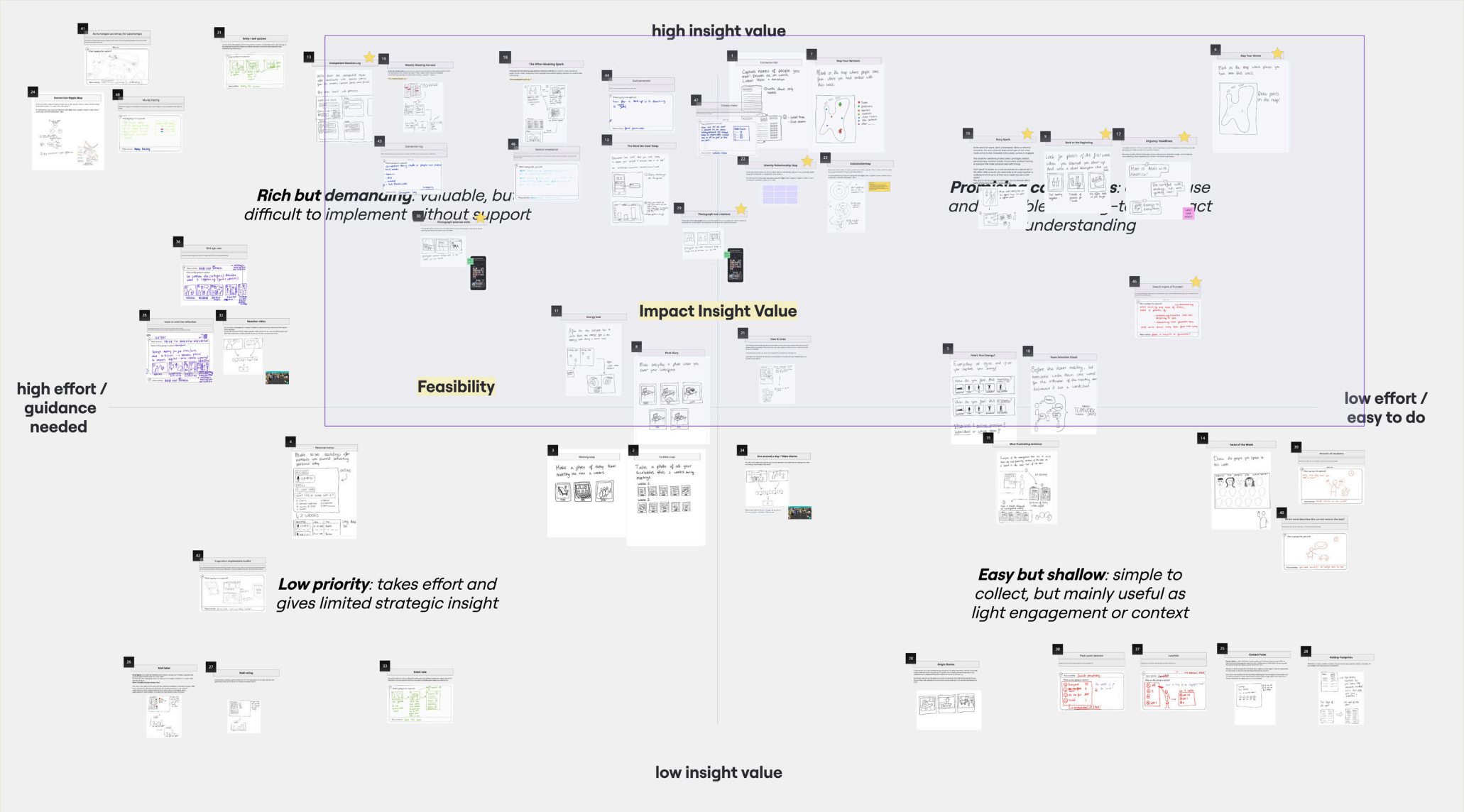



## B.4 The 48 prototypes

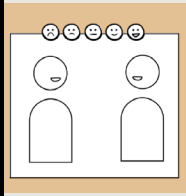


## B.5 C-BOX


high insight value
Rich but demanding: valuable, but difficult to implement without support
Impact Insight Value
Feasibility
high effort / guidance needed
low effort / easy to do
Low priority: takes effort and gives limited strategic insight
Easy but shallow: simple to collect, but mainly useful as light engagement or context
low insight value

## B.6 Clustering ideas

# B.7 Six prototypes



## Prototype 1 —Log the interaction (online)

*A online capture moment that asks the start-up to log recent connections*

### Short description

In this 10–15 minute online test, the start-up logs three recent connections. For each, three pieces of information are recorded: the name of the person or organisation; the type of connection (co-founder, investor, mentor, client, supplier, partner, designer, advisor); and one PrEmo emotion that best represents how the interaction felt (DESMET, 2019). After the three entries, the start-up sees an overview of the documented connections, including the types of people in their network and the emotional tone of those relationships.

### Goal of the test

The test explores whether start-ups can quickly and meaningfully reflect on their recent network interactions. It reveals whether founders can recognise which people are currently supporting, challenging, enabling, or possibly slowing their development. The capture format is intentionally light: a short moment, without the analysis a traditional stakeholder mapping would demand.

### Connection to the systemic lens

The prototype is anchored primarily in *building relations* (Goss et al., 2026). Within the morphological map, it operationalises three relational shifts: an *increased number of relations*, an *increased number of new relations*, and an *increased number of intensified relations* *(See figure x)*. The PrEmo emotion makes the third shift visible: by attaching an emotional charge to each interaction, the prototype shows which connections have deepened, beyond a simple count of contacts. Over time, the aggregated log also feeds framing complexity: the chart that emerges turns a stream of interactions into a readable picture of network development.

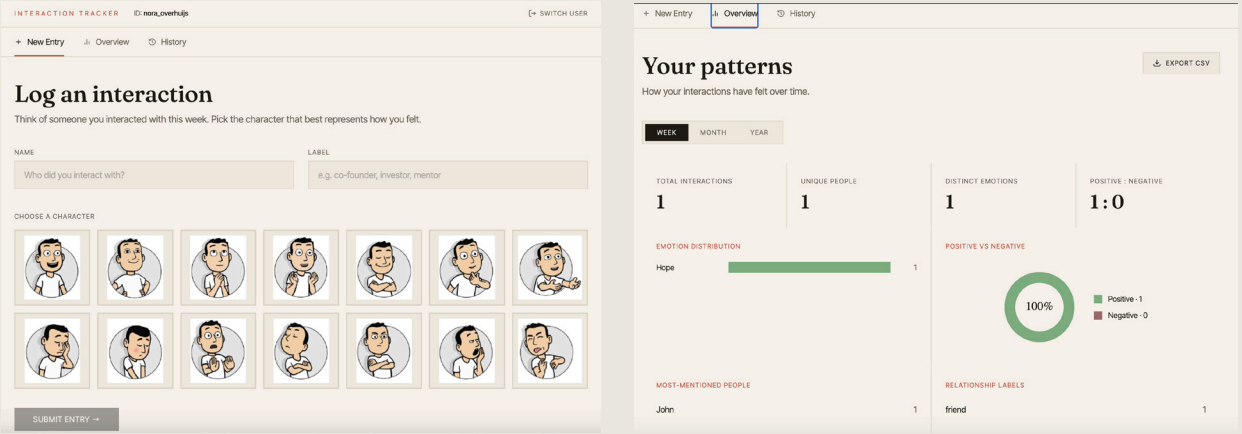



*Figure x - Interaction log website interface, made together with Claude.AI*

*Figure x - Used pratices of the Morphological overview*

### What it could reveal in the long term

With repeated use, the log could help start-ups and Secrid see how a venture's network is developing: which relationships are most present or most missing, whether the start-up is speaking mainly to supporters, customers, investors, experts, or peers, and which relationships feel energising, uncertain, or promising.

## Prototype 2 — Origin story (online)

*A short online capture moment that asks the start-up to return to one photo from the very beginning of their venture and reflect on what that moment still means today.*

### Short description

In this 10–15 minute online test in the form of a Miro board, the start-up finds and uploads one photo from the beginning of their journey. The photo can show anything that marks the founding period: an early sketch, a first prototype, a material sample, a studio moment, a first meeting, a failure, an experiment. Alongside the photo, the start-up answers two short questions: *What do we see in this photo?* and *Why does this moment matter to your start-up journey?* The format is deliberately spare to invite a slower, more personal kind of reflection.

### Goal of the test

The test helps start-ups reflect on where they started and on what has changed since. By going back to the beginning, it surfaces the early moments, choices, and struggles that shaped the venture's direction. It also brings out the story behind the start-up: not only what they are building now, but what motivated them to begin and what kind of change they originally wanted to create.

### Connection to the systemic lens

The prototype is anchored in two systemic concepts: the *entry point to the system* (Van der Bijl-Brouwer, 2023) and *nurturing reflexivity* (Goss et al., 2026). The photo functions as the visual anchor of the founder's entry point: the place from which they entered the system they are now trying to shift. The reflective question that follows then activates the second anchor: by asking what fundamental change has happened since that moment, the prototype invites the founder into the practice

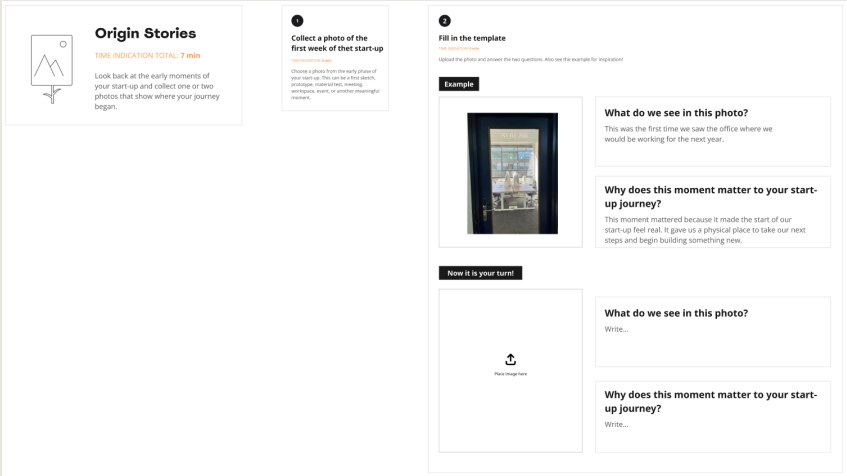


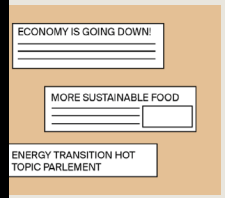

*Figure x - Origin story excersize in Miro board*

*Figure x - Used pratices of the Morphological overview*

of re-examining their own framings, values, and position.

### What it could reveal in the long term

With repeated use, the test could help start-ups build a visual archive of their impact journey. Repeating the reflection at different moments (quarterly, yearly, or at major venture milestones) could show how the product, the team, the mission, and the founder's own understanding of impact have evolved across time.




## Prototype 3 — Urgency headlines (online)

*A short online capture moment that asks the start-up to step outside its own pitch and find the headlines through which the wider world is already talking about the problem the venture responds to.*

### Short description

In this 10–15 minute online test, the start-up searches online for one or two headlines or public signals that connect to the problem the venture is addressing. The signals can come from news articles, LinkedIn posts, reports, policy statements, industry updates, or campaign slogans. For each headline, the start-up records the headline, the source, and a short answer to: *Why is this relevant to the problem your start-up addresses?* At the end, the start-up chooses the one headline that best captures the urgency of the problem.

### Goal of the test

The test helps start-ups connect their internal story to the outside world. Founders often speak from the inside out, about their product, technology, or business model. This test asks the reverse: to look outward and identify the public signals that show why the problem is current, visible, and socially relevant. The headlines make urgency tangible and reveal how well the start-up frames its work within a broader societal context.

### Connection to the systemic lens

The prototype operates by *zooming out*. Rather than asking the start-up to look at itself, it asks the venture to see itself from a distance, through the language of actors outside of it. This makes it an exercise in *nurturing reflexivity*: how does the founder tell their story, and can it be strengthened or destabilised by the headlines that surround it? The prototype is also anchored in *meaningful formgiving*: a complex system

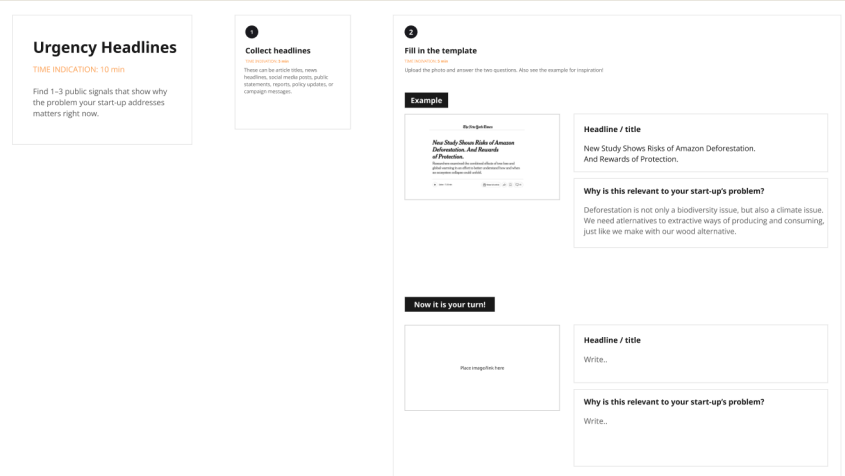


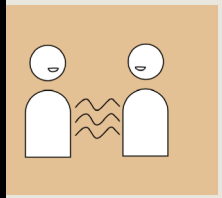

*Figure x - Urgency headline excersize in Miro board*

*Figure x - Used pratices of the Morphological overview*

becomes legible to an outside listener through the public language that already circulates around the problem

### What it could reveal in the long term

With repeated use, the test could help start-ups build an "urgency archive": a growing collection of external signals that supports and sharpens their impact story. Such an archive could help founders communicate more concretely why their work matters now, not only to customers but to partners, funders, investors, and policymakers.



## Prototype 4 — Relationship line (online)

*A short online reflection moment that asks the start-up to focus on one meaningful relationship in their network and map both how it feels now and how they would like it to develop.*

### Short description

In this online exercise, the start-up reflects on one meaningful relationship in their network: a co-founder, an investor, a mentor, a client, a partner, or another connection that matters. The start-up first maps how the relationship feels at the present moment, then maps how they would like it to develop in the future. Placing the two states alongside each other invites them to identify possible shifts in trust, reciprocity, intensity, and the balance between professional and personal connection.

### Goal of the test

The test moves beyond a static overview of stakeholders and creates space for reflection on the *quality* and *direction* of a relationship. Where many existing tools treat a network as a fixed map of named contacts, this prototype treats each relationship as something with its own history and trajectory. It also produces thick data, which is especially valuable when talking about relations. By asking the start-up to imagine the relationship as they would like it to be, the test turns reflection into intention.

### Connection to the systemic lens

From a systemic perspective, a relationship is not a fixed thing but something that keeps changing, shaped over time by trust, give-and-take, boundaries, and the way people influence each other (West et al., 2024). The prototype looks at *how the relationship works*, rather than at the people in it or their formal roles. This connects to the idea that systems often

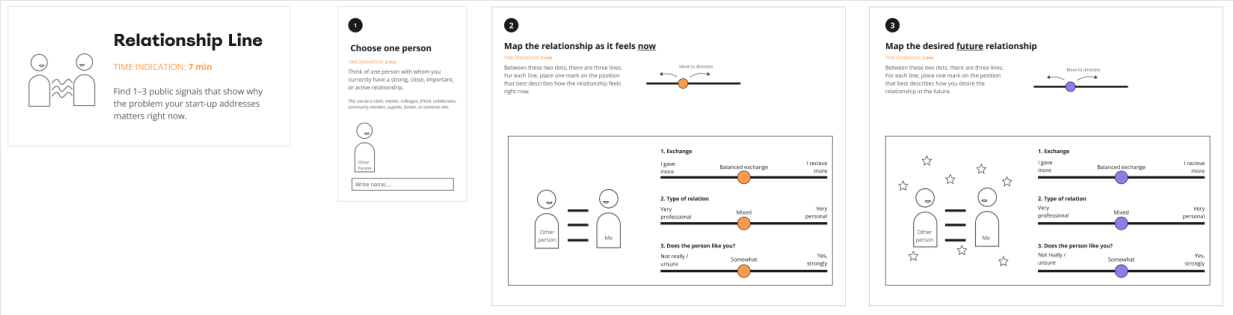



*Figure x - Urgency headline excersize in Miro board*

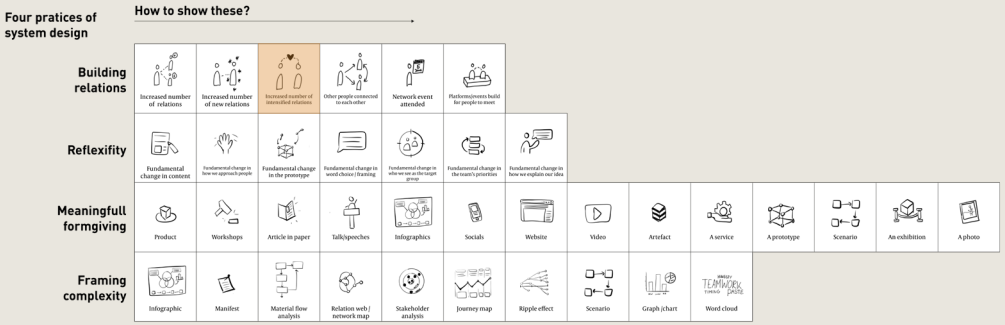



*Figure x - Used pratices of the Morphological overview*

change through shifts in the quality of relationships, not just through changes in structures or job titles. By placing the current and desired states side by side, the prototype shows where the relationship is heading.

### What it could reveal in the long term

With repeated use, the test could help founders become more aware of how they build and maintain the relationships their venture depends on. Over time, it may reveal recurring patterns: relationships that remain one-sided, connections that need clearer boundaries, or partnerships that could grow through more trust. Repeating the exercise makes subtle relational shifts visible: a relationship moving from transactional to collaborative, or a partnership cooling without anyone noticing.

## Prototype 5 — Map your moves (physical)

*A short physical capture moment that asks the start-up to mark on a map the places where, in the past day or week, the venture has actually moved: visited, partnered with, reached out to, or been reached by.*

### Short description

In this 10–15 minute test, the start-up looks back at the past day or week and marks the locations that mattered for the venture. Depending on the scale of the activities, the founder can choose between a map of the Netherlands and a map of Europe. The start-up names three places, briefly notes what happened there (a visit, a meeting, a partnership, a piece of correspondence), and places a dot on the map at the corresponding location. The result is a tangible, low-resolution geographic snapshot of where the venture has been active.

### Goal of the test

The test explores whether start-ups can easily and quickly visualise the geographical reach of their activities and relationships. The map makes the spatial footprint of the venture's work visible: where the network is concentrated, where the support system sits, where opportunities are emerging, and where the venture is currently spending its attention.

### Connection to the systemic lens

The prototype is anchored in two parts of the systemic frame. First, it operationalises *framing complexity* (Goss et al., 2026): the marked-up map functions as a small infographic that, in a single glance, captures both where the venture has been and how its reach is spread across space. Second, the prototype activates the *relational concept* of scale and scaling (West et al., 2024). A venture's scale can be *broad* (spread across many places, with light contact in each) or *deep* (locally rooted, with strong presence in a few). The map makes that distinction visible. Over time, the prototype also makes the *ripple effect* of the venture's work tangible: how a local intervention extends outward through new contacts, visits, and partnerships in new places (Nobles et al., 2022).

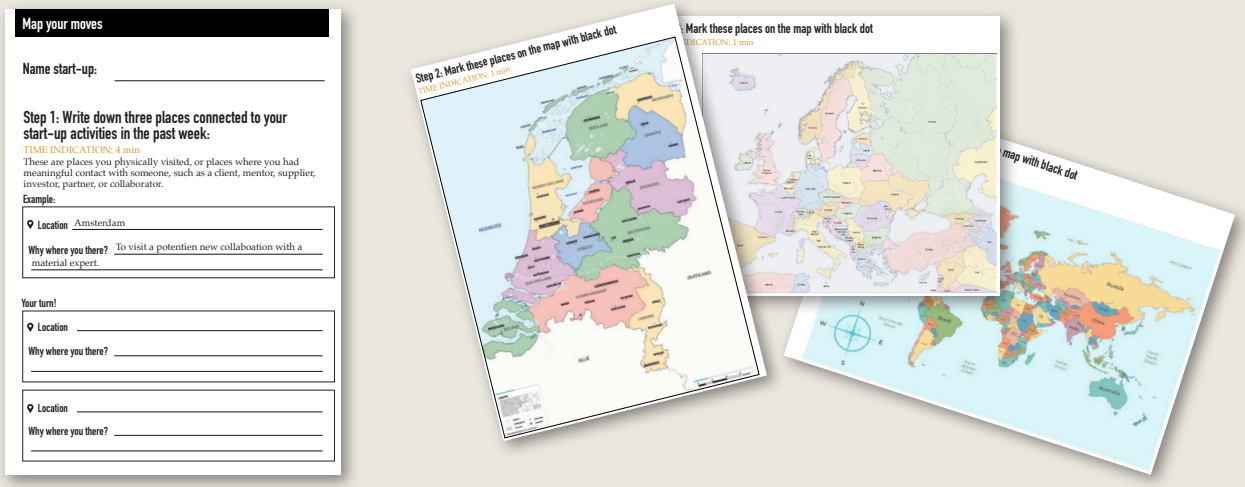
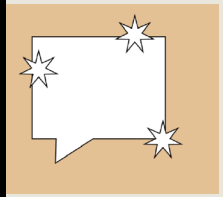



*Figure x - Map your moves template with the three maps*

*Figure x - Used pratices of the Morphological overview*

### What it could reveal in the long term

With repeated use (weekly, monthly, or at major moments) the map could help start-ups understand how a venture's geographical reach grows.



## Prototype 6 – Story spark (physical)

*A short physical capture moment that asks the start-up to look back at a recent encounter and isolate the single moment in which someone visibly reacted to part of the story.*

### Short description

n this physical exercise, the start-up thinks back to a recent event, pitch, meeting, demo, conversation, or informal encounter. They write down one moment where someone reacted in a noticeable way: enthusiasm, curiosity, surprise, confusion, concern, recognition, or emotional engagement. The start-up then answers three questions: *What did you share? What was the reaction? and Why do you think this part triggered the reaction?*

### Goal of the test

The test helps start-ups notice which parts of their story actually create energy, curiosity, trust, confusion, or emotional connection. Founders repeat their story many times, in pitches, meetings, and passing conversations, but rarely track which parts are doing the work. The test is designed to move the start-up from "we told our story" to "we learned which part of our story affected someone, and why."

### Connection to the systemic lens

The prototype is anchored in *nurturing reflexivity* (Goss et al., 2026), the practice that keeps founders attentive to their own framings as conditions evolve. Within the morphological map, it surfaces three specific kinds of *fundamental change in how the start-up is communicating: a change in context* (what is being shared and in what setting), a *change in word choice and framing* (which language activates which reactions), and a change in *how the idea itself is being explained.*

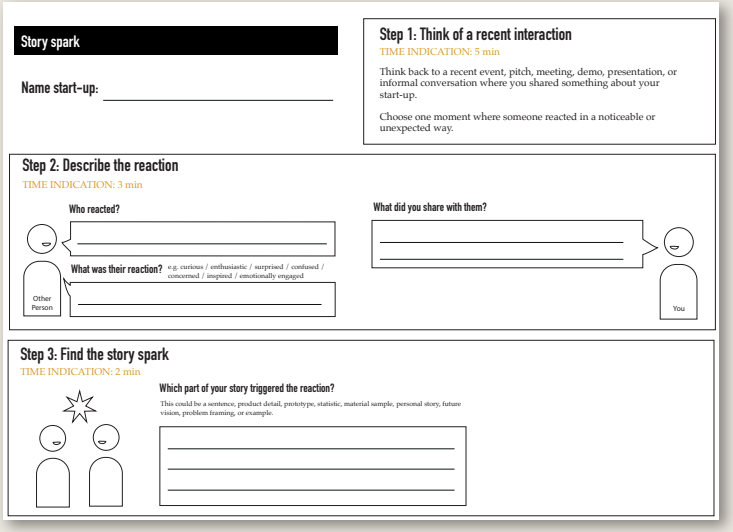


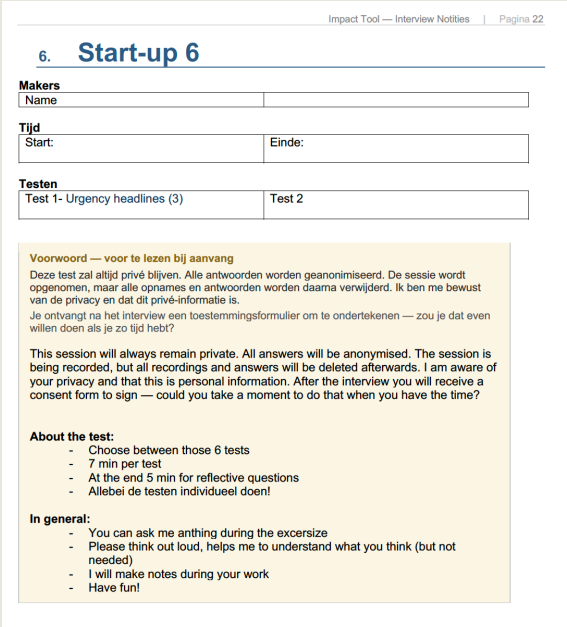

*Figure x - Story spark template*

*Figure x - Used pratices of the Morphological overview*

### What it could reveal in the long term

With repeated use, the test could help start-ups build a small archive of "story sparks": moments where their story actively created a reaction. Patterns may emerge over time: which parts consistently create enthusiasm, which parts create confusion or doubt, which audiences respond to which messages, and which examples or visuals make the impact feel tangible.

## B.8 Testing protocol per start-up



Impact Tool — Interview Notities | Pagina 22

6. **Start-up 6**

**Makers**

| Name | |
|---|---|

**Tijd**

| Start: | Einde: |
|---|---|

**Testen**

| Test 1- Urgency headlines (3) | Test 2 |
|---|---|

**Voorwoord — voor te lezen bij aanvang**

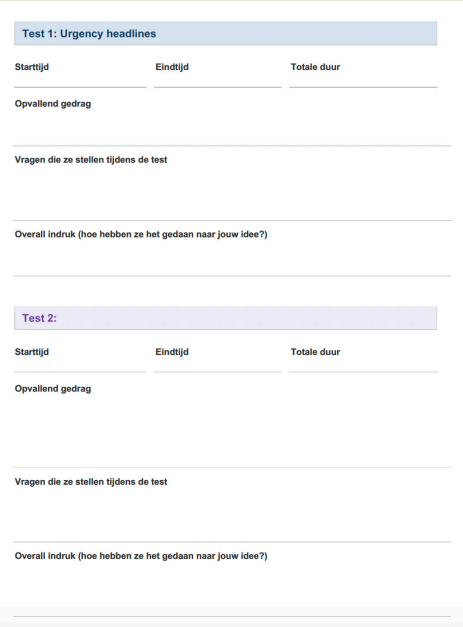
Deze test zal altijd privé blijven. Alle antwoorden worden geanonimiseerd. De sessie wordt opgenomen, maar alle opnames en antwoorden worden daarna verwijderd. Ik ben me bewust van de privacy en dat dit privé-informatie is.

Je ontvangt na het interview een toestemmingsformulier om te ondertekenen — zou je dat even willen doen als je zo tijd hebt?

This session will always remain private. All answers will be anonymised. The session is being recorded, but all recordings and answers will be deleted afterwards. I am aware of your privacy and that this is personal information. After the interview you will receive a consent form to sign — could you take a moment to do that when you have the time?

**About the test:**
- Choose between those 6 tests
- 7 min per test
- At the end 5 min for reflective questions
- Allebei de testen individueel doen!

**In general:**
- You can ask me anthing during the excersize
- Please think out loud, helps me to understand what you think (but not needed)
- I will make notes during your work
- Have fun!



**Test 1: Urgency headlines**

Starttijd | Eindtijd | Totale duur

Opvallend gedrag

Vragen die ze stellen tijdens de test

Overall indruk (hoe hebben ze het gedaan naar jouw idee?)

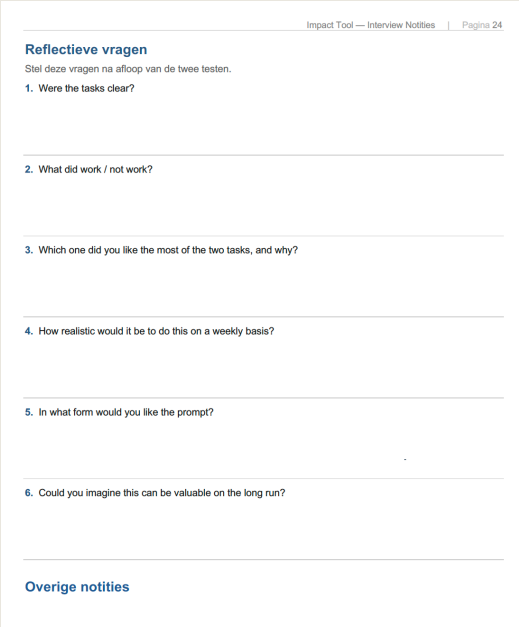
**Test 2:**

Starttijd | Eindtijd | Totale duur

Opvallend gedrag

Vragen die ze stellen tijdens de test

Overall indruk (hoe hebben ze het gedaan naar jouw idee?)



Impact Tool — Interview Notities | Pagina 24

**Reflectieve vragen**

Stel deze vragen na afloop van de twee testen.

1. Were the tasks clear?
2. What did work / not work?
3. Which one did you like the most of the two tasks, and why?
4. How realistic would it be to do this on a weekly basis?
5. In what form would you like the prompt?
6. Could you imagine this can be valuable on the long run?

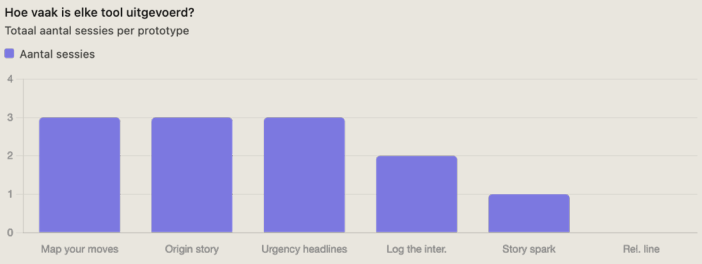
**Overige notities**

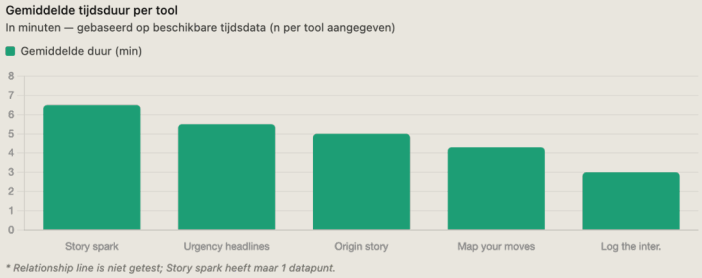
Made together with the help of Claude.AI

## B.9 Qualitative and Quantitative results

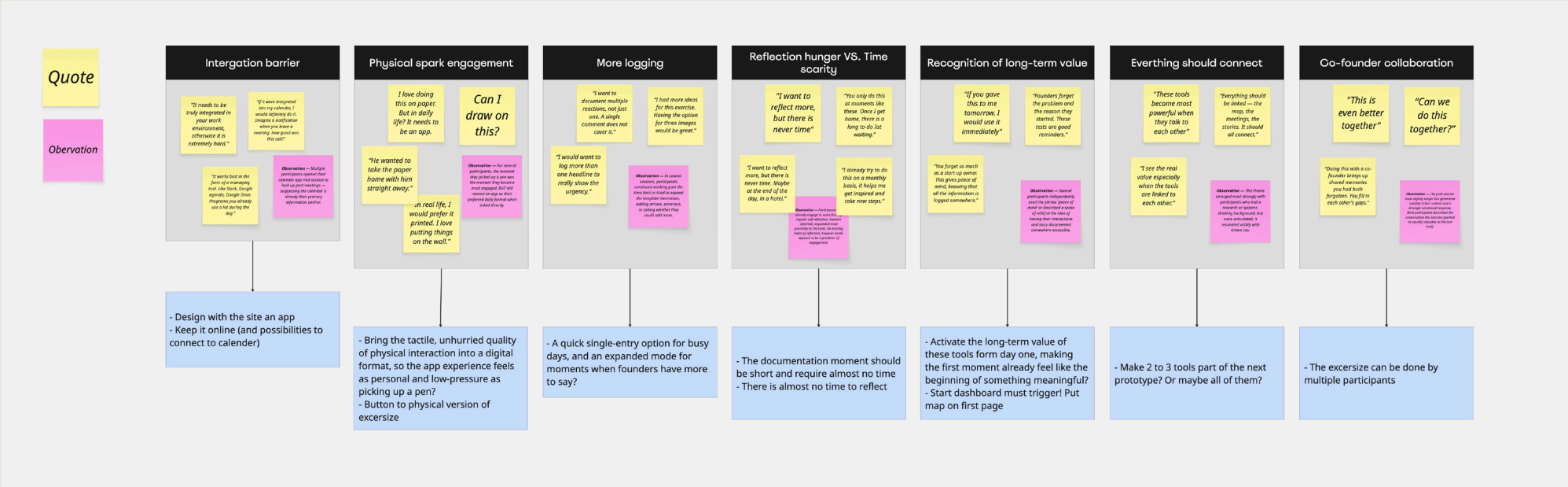
# Quantitative results

| 6 | 12 | 5 / 6 | Origin story & Urgency |
|---|---|---|---|
| sessies totaal | testjes totaal | tools getest | meest gekozen (vrij) |

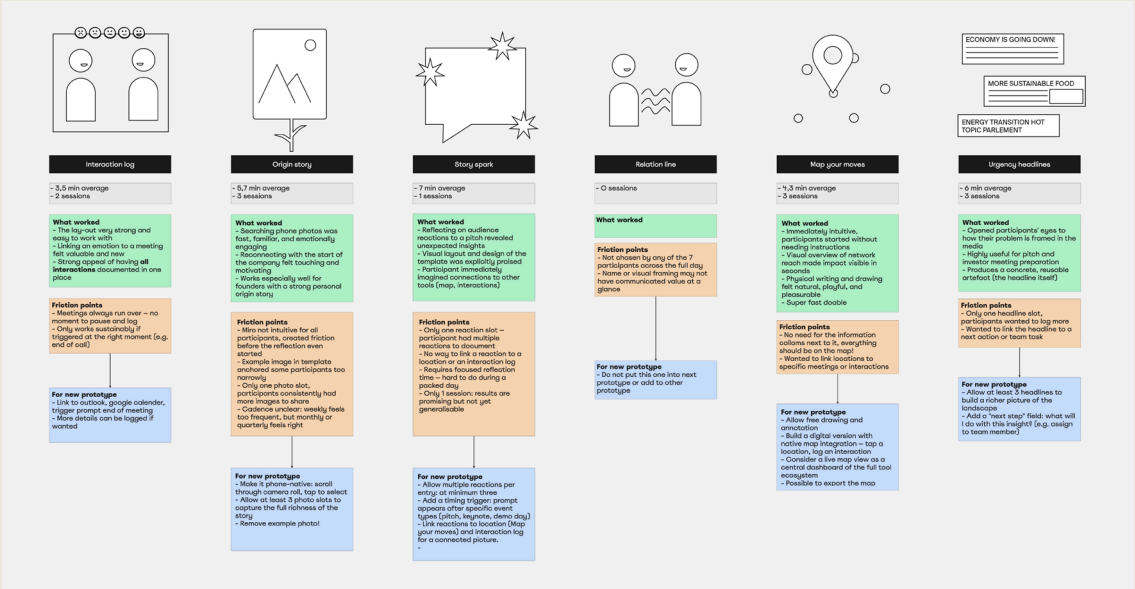


# Qualitative thematic analysis

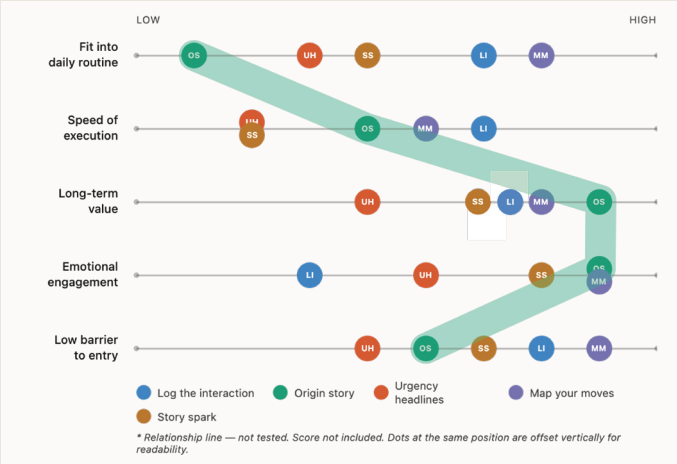



# Analysis per tool

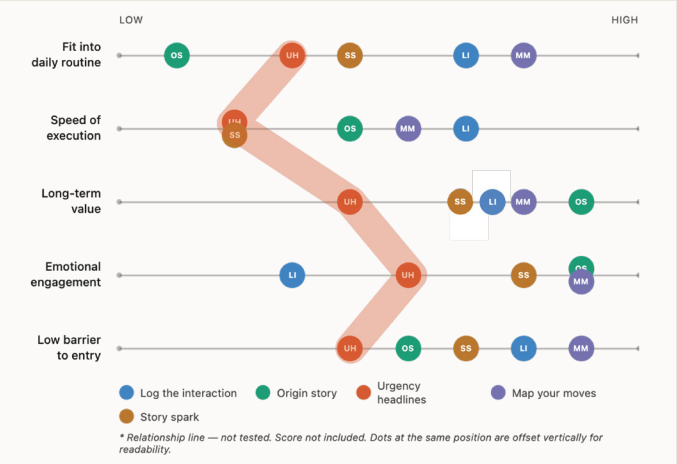


# Analysis per tool

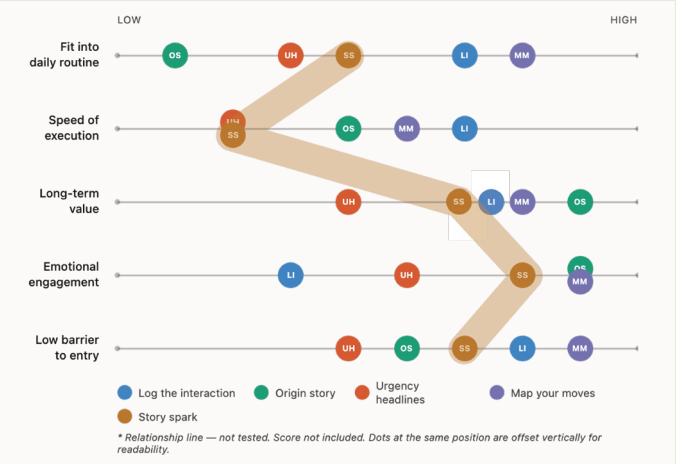
## Origin story



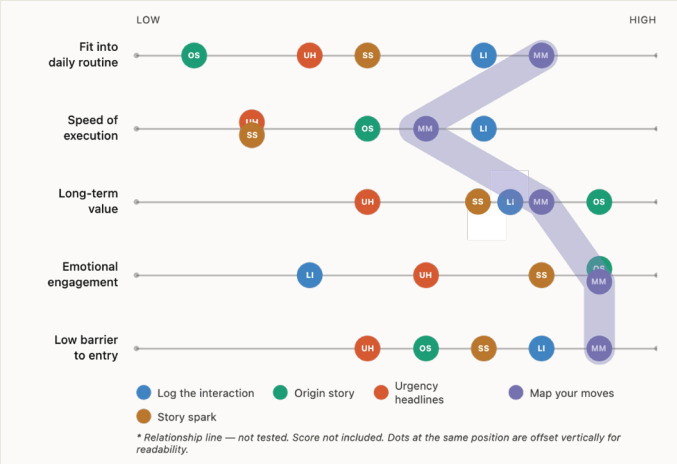

## Urgency headline



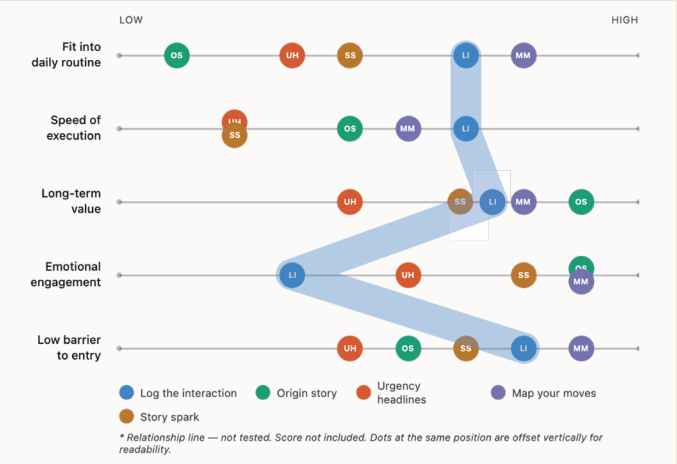

## Story spark




## Map your moves




## Log the interation



# C.1 Quarterly report data analysis

Made together with the help of Claude.AI

## Data analysis of the Trace quarterly report

### 1 Introduction

The Trace quarterly report translates a CSV export of a start-up's log entries into four visualisations: Reach (geography), Relations (network), What moves you (external signals and internal insights), and What you started (milestones). This appendix describes the analysis and categorisation choices that sit between the raw log data and each visualisation.

The report is a single client-side HTML/JavaScript file. All analysis runs inside the browser; no data leaves the user's machine. The full source is provided as an attached file ("`quarterly_report.html`") for readers who wish to inspect any calculation directly.

### 2 Data source

The input is a single CSV file exported from the Trace mobile app. Each row is one logged moment. Every row carries a `log_type` column that tags it as one of four categories:

- `interaction` — a moment with a person, organisation, place, or non-human entity
- `headline` — an external signal or news item the founder flagged
- `new_begin` — a milestone or new direction
- `story_spark` — a moment when something the founder shared triggered a reaction from others

The analysis groups rows by `log_type` and processes each group with a different pipeline. Everything described below happens per selected period; rows outside the period are filtered out first.

### 3 Analysis per dashboard section

#### 3.1 Reach — where the work happened

**Input.** Interaction rows within the selected period.

**Calculations.**

- **Cities touched**: the number of distinct values in the `location` column.
- **Deepest spot**: the city with the highest interaction count, together with its share of the total (for example, "Rotterdam — 2 of 4 moments, 50%").
- **Focus**: a derived label — "Concentrated" if the top city holds more than half of the interactions, "Balanced" if it holds roughly a quarter to a half, and "Spread" otherwise.
- **Map dots**: each city becomes one circle on the Leaflet map. The radius is scaled by the interaction count and the label shows the city name and count.

**Categorisation choices.** None. The `location` field is used as written by the founder, without normalisation. If a city is spelled inconsistently between rows, the two spellings are counted separately.

#### 3.2 Relations — who and what shaped the work

**Input.** Interaction rows and their per-relation aggregates (grouped by `name_or_title`).

**Calculations.**

- **Donut breakdown**: interactions are grouped by the `subtype` column into four categories — Human (`person`), Place (`place`), Organisation (`organisation`), and Non-human (`nonhuman`). Each donut slice is proportional to its count.
- **New relations**: names that appear for the first time within the selected period.
- **Intensified relations**: relations whose emotion trend (based on the `emotion_1_5` field measured across their multiple logs) shows a rising pattern. Relations with only one interaction are excluded.
- **Give / receive across exchange types**: each interaction row can list one or more exchange tags in `dig_exchanged` (for example "connection", "feedback", "prototype", "mentoring"). For each tag, the report counts how many interactions were logged as "I gave more", "Balanced", or "I received more" from the `dig_exchange` field. These counts become a stacked horizontal bar chart.
- **Relations that shifted**: relations logged more than once whose `dig_exchange` value or `dig_relation_style` value changes between their first and last interaction in the period. The report highlights the transition as pill labels (for example, "I gave more → Balanced") with the relation's name as caption.
- **Top strongly appreciated**: relations for which the founder marked `dig_appreciation` as "Strongly" (value 2), ranked by how many times they were spoken with during the period. The dashboard displays the top three.

**Categorisation choices.**

- Numeric codes in the CSV are converted to text labels using fixed mappings:
- `dig_exchange`: 0 = "I gave more", 1 = "Balanced", 2 = "I received more".
- `dig_relation_style`: 0 = "Very professional", 1 = "Mixed", 2 = "Very personal".
- `dig_appreciation`: 0 = "No", 1 = "Yes", 2 = "Strongly".
- The emotion score (`emotion_1_5`) is grouped into three sentiment bands: positive (4–5), neutral (3), negative (1–2).
- The `subtype` tag maps directly onto the four donut categories, with no intermediate normalisation.

#### 3.3 What moves you — external signals and internal sparks

**Input.** `headline` rows and `story_spark` rows within the selected period.

**Calculations.**

- **Urgency Headlines**: listed in date order. Rows where `urgent` is "Yes" receive a highlighted styling with an "Urgent" label.
- **Story Sparks**: each row is displayed as a compact card containing the shared moment (`spark_what_shared`), the reaction received (`spark_reactions`), and — through categorisation — a derived trigger tag.
- **Top spark trigger**: every spark is assigned one trigger tag (see below). The tag with the highest frequency is displayed as the top insight for the section, together with the trigger-detail notes from every spark that shares that tag.

**Categorisation choices.**

- Each story spark is tagged with one of ten trigger types: *Sentence, Material sample, Personal story, Product detail, Prototype, Statistic, Question, Moment of silence, Direction, Insight*.
- The tag is derived from the `spark_reasons` field — the founder's free-text explanation of why they think the reaction happened. Because this field is unstructured, the tagging is applied when the CSV is imported rather than computed automatically at runtime.
- For sparks tagged as *Sentence*, a short trigger-detail is stored per spark (for example "geographic specificity", "concrete commitment"). This lets the top-trigger block list which kinds of sentences landed, rather than only naming the tag itself.

#### 3.4 What you started — what was set in motion

**Input.** `new_begin` rows within the selected period.

**Calculations.**

- **Number of new beginnings**: the count of rows.
- **Timeline**: rows sorted chronologically and rendered as markers along a vertical line, each with its title and date.
- **Most common type**: the dominant thematic category across the beginnings (see categorisation).

**Categorisation choices.**

- Beginnings are classified thematically into one of four categories: *Prototype, Partnership, Direction, Insight*. This vocabulary matches the categories used inside the Trace app itself, so that the report and the app speak the same language.
- The classification is inferred from the beginning's title (`new_begin_description`), what changed (`what_changed`), and why it matters (`why_it_matters`). Because the CSV does not yet contain a dedicated tag column for new beginnings, this classification is currently applied during CSV import.

### 4 Where each calculation lives in the code

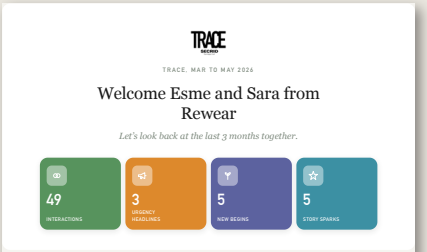
Every calculation described above appears as a JavaScript function inside the report file. The most important ones are listed below so that a reader inspecting the source can locate them directly:

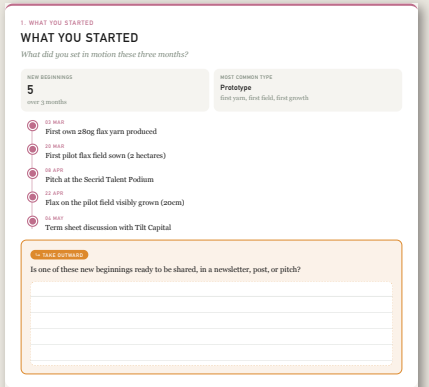
- `initMap()` — Reach map: aggregates city counts, scales the circle markers, and adds the permanent city labels.
- `renderDonut()` — Relations donut: draws the four proportional slices from the `donut` array in the DATA object and animates the hover interactions.
- `buildRelationsData()` — Relations column: assembles the mini-stats, the give-receive bar chart, the shifted relations block, and the top strongly appreciated list.
- `computeTopTrigger()` and `triggerImpactSentence()` — What moves you: count trigger tags across the sparks, pick the most frequent one, and generate the sentence displayed in the top-trigger block.
- `buildMovesData()` — What moves you column: assembles the headlines list, the sparks list, and the top-trigger card.
- `buildStartedData()` — What you started: assembles the count, the type stat, and the vertical timeline.
- `updateLocks()` — progressive disclosure: controls when the next dashboard column becomes visible after a founder saves a Take-outward reflection.

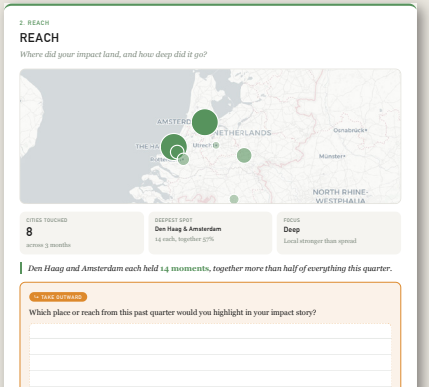
The DATA object at the top of the script holds every value that ends up on screen. Any reviewer who wants to reproduce the analysis on a different CSV can inspect this object and its four sub-objects (Reach, Relations, What moves you, What you started) to see the aggregated data that drives every visualisation.

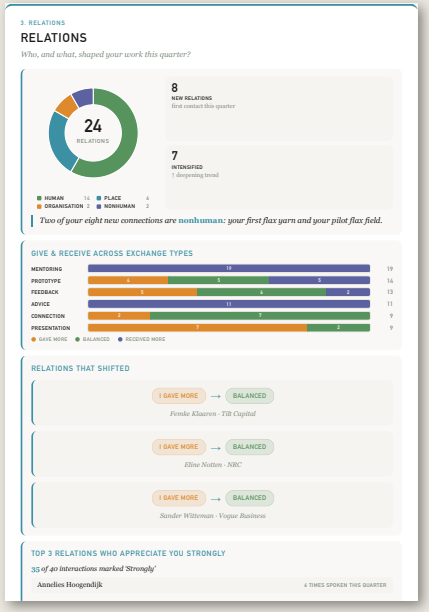
# C.2 Physical quartly report

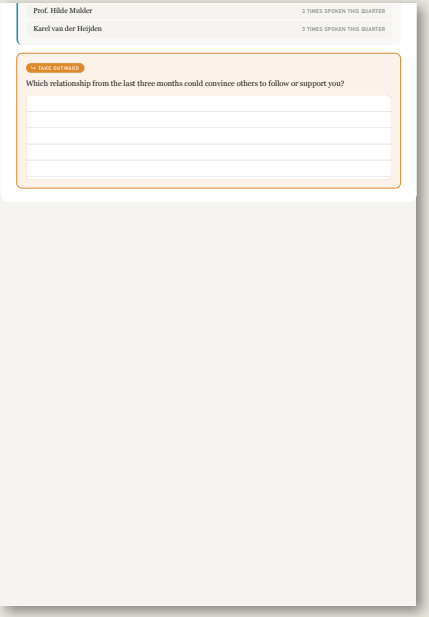
Made together with the help of Claude.AI

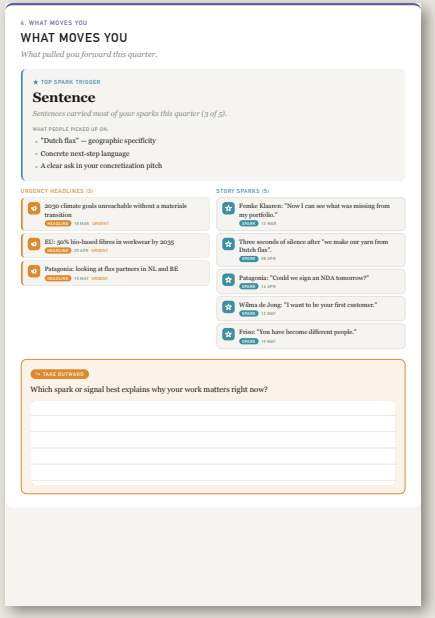


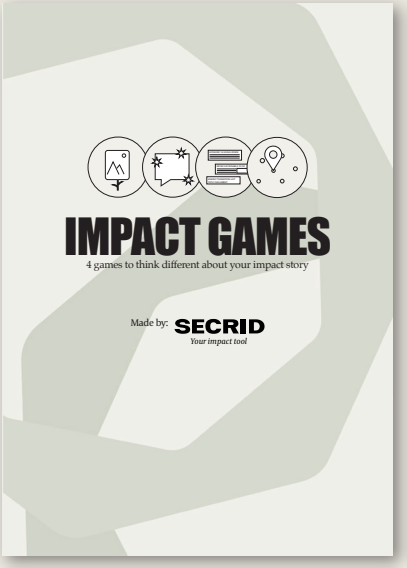



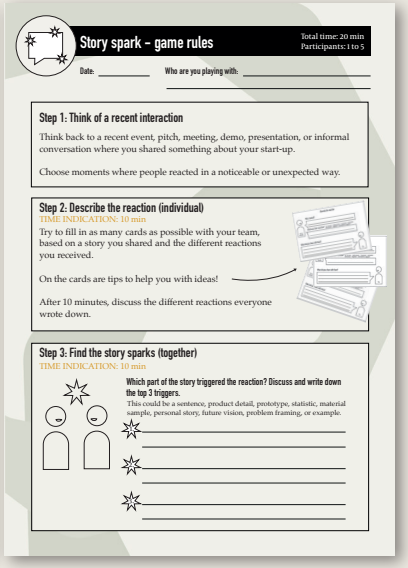



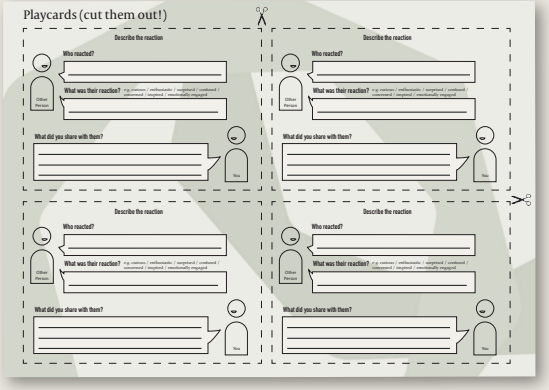



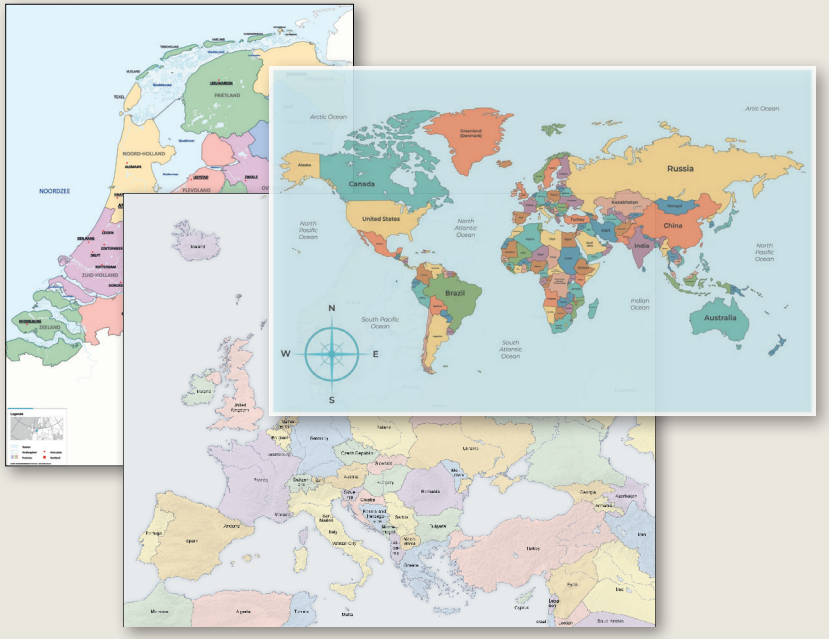



# C.3 Impact Games







# C.4 Interview protocol Usability interview

Made together with the help of Claude.AI

TESTPROTOCOL

## Trace · Impact Log + Quarterly Report

*Sessie met Secrid Impact Fund start-up · 60 min*

**WAT WIL JE LEREN?**
1. Voelt de logging-handeling natuurlijk? Welke log-types triggeren wel/niet?
2. Levert het zien van data (Rewear-voorbeeld) waarde? Triggert het om te blijven loggen?
3. Werkt het Quarterly Report als reflectief moment? Zet het aan tot denken?

### Voorbereiding (vooraf doen)

- trace.html openen in browser (neutrale, lege state)
- trace-rewear.html in apart tabblad (gevulde data state)
- quarterly_report.html in derde tabblad
- Opname starten — toestemming vragen aan deelnemer
- Notitieblok klaar: per blok 1-2 quotes/observaties noteren

### Doel test:

- Laag 1 – **Usability** – kun je het bedienen?
- Laag 2 – **Understandability** – snap je wat dit is?
- Laag 3 – **Motivation and adoption** - zou je dit ook gebruiken zonder mij?
- Laag 4 – **Value** – Snapt die de waarde van deze tool voor zijn impact verhaal?

### 0 Welkom & kader — 12:00

Hij kent je al, dus kort. Geen lange warm-up.

- Sign the co-creation form
- Can make photos and record this meeting?

- "Today I'm testing three things: how logging feels, what the data looks like, and the reflection moment."
- "Think out loud. Nothing is wrong here — I'm the one learning, not you."
- "Is it okay if I record this?"

### 1 App loggen — neutrale omgeving — 12:05

*Doel: handeling van loggen + welke types triggeren?*

**Opdrachten**

1. Log-in + first time use screens.
   "Log in and have a look around. Think out loud — tell me what you see and what's going through your head." (3 min — kap af!)
2. Look around in the app
3. Log #1 (interaction) — "Think about your most recent work interaction that really mattered. Log it now." (3 min)
4. Log #2 (new beginning) — "Think about a recent new direction or breakthrough in your design work. Would you want to log this?" (3 min — let op het 'would you': test zowel handeling als motivatie)
5. Log #3 (own choice) — "You've now done two logs. Of the remaining types (headline / spark), which one would you want to add yourself? Why that one?" (3 min)
6. Cadence — "Take a look at the calendar. When in your week or month would you want this reflection moment to happen?" (1 min)

**MINI-REFLECTIE BLOK 1 · 3 min**
1. From 1-5 how clear was it do this?
2. "What felt natural? Where was there friction?"
3. "Which log type would you use most often? Which one almost never?"
4. "Is a log type missing? Or are there too many?"
5. "Do you like the medium of logging with an app?"

### 2 App met data — Rewear-voorbeeld — 12:20

*Doel: globale interface-indruk + triggert het om te loggen?*

A **Dutch sustainable textile start-up** growing and producing its own **flax yarn**. Instead of importing fibres from Asia, Esme and Lior grow the flax in the Netherlands themselves and spin it into yarn — aimed at sustainable workwear and clothing brands.

The founders are **Esme and Lior**, a founder-duo within the Secrid Impact Fund.

**Opdrachten**

7. First impression — "What's your very first impression? In one sentence, describe the feeling this app gives you." (2 min)
8. Clarity — "Do you understand at a glance how this app works and how this data got here? What don't you immediately get?" (3 min)
9. Trigger to log (kern!) — "Imagine this is your data over 3 months. Which part here would really motivate you to keep logging? Which part leaves you cold? What's missing that would trigger you?" (5 min)

### 3 Quarterly Report — 12:25

*Doel: werkt het als reflectief moment? Zet het aan tot denken?*

**Set-up (1 min)**

"It's the end of the quarter now. You and Esmee have blocked an hour in your week to sit down together and go through your reflection moment — side by side, on one screen. This is your shared ritual."

"Start at the opening page, scroll through at your own pace, and think out loud — as Lior, with Esmee next to you. Ask any questions you want. The data isn't yours, but try to feel what Esme and Lior would feel."

**Doorlopen (14 min — ~3 min per sectie)**

*Laat hem zelf door alle secties scrollen. Alleen ingrijpen als hij stil valt.*

1. Intro / Welkomstpagina → I want you to read the first page and then begin (say out loud what you see)
2. Now I want you to intuitively go through this report, I know this is not your data, so do feel too serious when you try to fill in the the take outwards.

- 01 — Reach (map / waar ben je geweest)
- 02 — Relations (donut / netwerk)
- 03 — What moves you (urgent headlines)
- 04 — What you started (sparks / new beginnings)

- Closing — laat hem de reflectie INVULLEN (cruciaal!)

- Download, now I want you to download the results

**Stand-by doorvragen (alleen bij stilte):**

- "What do you see here? What does this mean to you?"

- "How do you like it to be a website?"

- "Anything missing? Does what's here feel right?"

- "Would you want to share this — with your team? With Secrid? With external partners"

**MINI-REFLECTIE BLOK 3 · 3 min**
1. "Which section moved you most? Which one adds the least?"
2. "Did filling in the reflection feel natural — or forced?"
3. "Would you keep this report, share it, or throw it away?"

### ✓ Eindgesprek — 12:45

*Drie scherpe vragen — niet meer. Refereer aan quotes uit je notities.*

**Kernvragen**

10. What whould you overall from 1-5 give this experience?
11. Do you see the relation between the app and the report?
12. "Of the three parts — logging, seeing the data, the report — which one brings you as a founder the most value? Which one the least?"
13. "Between logging and the report there's a gap of 3 months. What needs to happen in that period for you to keep logging?"
14. "Be honest: if Secrid rolled this out to all 7 startups, who would drop off — and why?"

**Als er tijd over is:**

- "One thing you'd add, one thing that could go?"

**OBSERVATIE-TIPS TIJDENS DE SESSIE**
- Noteer per blok 1-2 letterlijke quotes — die kun je in het eindgesprek teruggeven.
- Let op momenten van twijfel / aarzelen — die wijzen op wrijving.
- Let op spontaan enthousiasme — daar zit de kern van de waarde.
- Schrijf bij Blok 2 specifiek op: WAT triggerde, WAT liet hem koud.
- Als hij wegklikt, terugscrollt of opnieuw kijkt: schrijf op WAAR en WAAROM.

Tijd over:
- Prototype laten zien van papier

# C.5 Interview protocol four week usability interview

Made together with the help of Claude.AI

## Interview guide – 4-week app test

Evaluation & motivation during longer-term use

*Graduation project TU Delft · Secrid Impact Fund · Duration: 60 minutes*

### Goal of this session

This interview aims to understand two things. First: does the quarterly report have value — how does she read her results, and would she use it to tell her long-term impact story? Second: what makes four weeks of logging sustainable — what motivates her, where is the friction, and how do I get it more firmly into her daily routine?

*This guide is my cheat sheet. The bold questions are the main questions; the dashes underneath are follow-up probes I only use if the conversation stalls. Let her do as much of the talking as possible.*

### Timing (60 min)

| | |
|---|---|
| **0–5 min** | Welcome, purpose & consent |
| **5–25 min** | Block 1 – Walking through the quarterly report together |
| **25–50 min** | Block 2 – Motivation during longer-term use |
| **50–58 min** | Future & routine |
| **58–60 min** | Wrap-up & thanks |

### 0–5 min · Welcome & consent

Keep it short and informal — you already know each other.

- Thank her for using the app for four weeks and for making time for this.
- Explain: this conversation helps me understand what works and what doesn't, so I can improve the tool. There are no right or wrong answers — criticism is especially valuable.
- We'll do two parts: first through your report together, then about what it was like to use it for four weeks.

**Is it okay if I record this conversation? It's only for my analysis and I won't share it further.**

**Do you have any questions before we start?**

### Block 1 · Walking through the quarterly report together (5–25 min)

*Share your screen or place the report between you. Let her open and read it herself — you mainly observe how she interprets it and where she gets stuck.*

#### First impression & navigation

**Could you open the report and take me through what you see out loud? Just start wherever your eye goes first.**

*Observation checklist for yourself: where does she look first? Where does she scroll past quickly? Where does she hesitate or frown?*

**What is the first thing you take away from this report? What does it tell you?**
- Does that match what you expected after four weeks of logging?
- Is there anything that surprises you or that you feel is missing?

**Was there a moment where you didn't understand something or weren't sure how to read it?**
- What would you have needed at that moment?

#### Value of the results

**Do you recognise your start-up in these figures and results? Does it feel like an honest picture?**
- What does, what doesn't?

**Does this report have value for your start-up right now, at this moment? Why or why not?**
- Who on your team would find this most useful?
- What would you do with it the moment you walk out of this session?

**Imagine your impact story one or two years from now — would you use this report to tell that story? To whom?**
- Are you thinking of investors, your team, customers, the Impact Fund … who is the audience?
- What would need to be in it that isn't there yet?

**If this report disappeared tomorrow — what would you miss?**

### Block 2 · Motivation during longer-term use (25–50 min)

*This is the heart of your research. Take your time, probe a lot, let silences fall.*

#### The four-week experience

**What was it like to use the app for four weeks straight? Take me through how that felt.**
- Did it get easier or harder as the weeks went on?
- Was there a week that was different from the rest?

**When during the day or week did you usually use it? Describe a typical moment.**
- What happened just before you picked up the app — what triggered it?

#### Which logs worked (and which didn't)

**Which log did you use most? Why that one in particular?**
- What did it give you — why did it feel worth the effort?

**And which log did you use least, or basically never? Why not?**
- Was it the log itself, the timing, or something else?
- What would need to change for you to use it — or could it just as well be dropped?

**Was there a log where you thought 'I'd have loved to log this, but I couldn't'?**

#### Ease & barriers

**Was the logging easy to do? Walk me through the steps you took.**
- Roughly how long did one logging session take?
- Was there anything that took more effort than you'd like?

**Was there ever a barrier — a moment when you actually wanted to log but didn't?**
- What held you back — forgetting, no time, no energy, not knowing what to log?
- Were any days skipped? What was different about those days?

**When did you enjoy doing it most? Describe such a moment.**
- What made that moment enjoyable — the feeling, the result, the timing?
- Can we create more of those moments?

### Future & routine (50–58 min)

**How do I get this more firmly into your daily routine? What would genuinely help with that?**
- Are you thinking of reminders, a fixed moment, linking it to something you already do?
- What would hold you back from keeping it up?

**Imagine: three months from now you're still using the app. What happened that made that work?**

**Would you recommend the app to another start-up? What would you say to them?**

### Extra sharp questions (use as needed)

*Use these if you have time left or want to dig deeper into an answer. They're deliberately a bit more challenging.*

**Being completely honest: is logging work or reward for you? Does it cost more than it gives, or the other way around?**

**What would have to happen for you to stop using the app? Where's your drop-off point?**

**Suppose the app cost €20 a month — would you still use it? At what price do you drop out?**

**Logging is an investment now for value later. When did that shift for you from 'have to' to 'want to' — or hasn't it yet?**

**Who would you be without this app — how did you track your impact before, and what does the app do better or worse than that?**

**If you could change, remove or add one thing to the app, what would it be?**

**Did logging ever feel like an obligation towards me or the Impact Fund, rather than something for yourself? Be honest — that really helps me.**

### Wrap-up (58–60 min)

**Is there anything I didn't ask about but that you'd like to share?**
- Thank her for the four weeks and for her honesty.
- Briefly explain what the next step in your project is.
- Ask whether you may come back with follow-up questions.

### Tips for yourself during the conversation

- Let silences fall — the most interesting answer often comes right after a pause.
- Probe with 'why?' and 'can you give me an example?' rather than filling in the answer yourself.
- Avoid leading questions ('didn't you find it nice that…'). Keep it open.
- React neutrally to criticism — criticism is exactly what you want to hear.
- Notice what she does, not just what she says (where does she get stuck in the report?).