

# Living the brand

Manifesting Internal Brand Alignment at WeTransfer

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June 2022

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# Abstract

The evolution of brand management leads to an understanding of brands as dynamic, co-created entities that express purpose and identity. With this emerging understanding, the role of employees in building and delivering a brand is increasingly recognised and exploited. Through internal branding efforts, companies can aim to improve the alignment of their employees with their brand, by making sure employees (1) understand the brand, (2) identify with the brand and (3) commit to the brand to eventually be able to (4) behave in line with the brand. This thesis aims to examine and improve the internal brand alignment at creative tech company WeTransfer, to eventually make for more fulfilled and connected employees, who can better deliver the brand promise to make for content and loyal customers.

To understand the context, a study consisting of corporate ethnography, qualitative interviews and existing data analysis was conducted. The findings from the research illustrate that the rapid growth of WeTransfer has a considerable impact on its internal brand and culture. On the one hand, there is a need for guidance of employees, to make sure their understanding of the brand does not fragment further. On the other hand, it is found that the freedom and autonomy of employees should be preserved. Thus, the challenge is to find a balance in guiding employees to contribute to the brand, while retaining their freedom.

To address this challenge, a strategy is developed based on concepts from literature, to (1) make the WeTransfer brand clear by concretising it internally and (2) make the brand live by facilitating an internal conversation. To illustrate how this strategy can be executed, a two-component design is proposed. Firstly, a WeTransfer manifesto is co-created with employees, aiming to translate the abstract brand values and purpose into concrete behaviour on the work floor. Secondly, the Living the brand program is developed to activate the manifesto and initiate discussion on the matter. The program is led by a team of brand ambassadors and engages all employees in several activities to learn about and reflect on the manifesto.

In this time of rapid growth, the design proposal has the potential to make explicit what aspects define WeTransfer and should be held on to. It helps the company strengthen those aspects and get all employees pulling in the same direction. Executing the advised strategy - making the brand clear and making it live - has the potential to contribute to the authenticity of WeTransfer's brand. Employees will be more strongly connected to the brand and be able to deliver the brand promise. That not only makes employees remain at their jobs but also improves customer satisfaction and loyalty.





**If you're looking  
for a sign, this is it**

**WeTransfer** Out of Office



## First of all,

That's me on the right, amid my colleagues at the famous WeTransfer Offsite. My expression quite accurately describes the wonder I have felt throughout the majority of this project.

The wonder of exploring a topic that really interested me, and how eventually everything around me felt connected to my project (I guess that's the fate of a graduate). The wonder of my own capabilities, too. Little did I expect myself to be able to manage such a project individually and even enjoy (parts of) it. And, the wonder of the kindness of everybody around me. For that, there are some people I'd like to call out.

Thank you, everybody who contributed to the project in one way or another (interviewees, participants, discussion partners). Thank you, Moniek and the L&D team, for being a warm bath. You are a team that bursts with creativity and every single one of you is always, but always, open for a chat. Mo, you have the wildest brain I know and were always able to enthuse me with that, but also to comfort me when needed. Thank you, Pinar, for always being honest and for giving me confidence in my work. You have boosted my mood several times. Thank you, Sijia, for sharing your expertise with me but more importantly, to support me throughout the process from the very beginning. Thank you both, Sijia and Pinar, for telling me too take a break sometimes - that has obviously been the greatest advice. Thank you, Mariska, for giving me your valuable advice. Thank you, Fay and Xander, for making our little home a great place to work and for reading and thinking along. Thank you, Juerd, for making me happy when I'm not. I don't want to say it's been a team project, but it's been a team project... Last but not least, thank you, Elly and Kees, for liking everything I create (passing the mom test?), but especially for supporting me in whatever choice I make. Oh, and for throwing a party the weekend before my thesis deadline.

Have a wonderful read.





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# Find your way through this report

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Pages that look like **this** introduce a new **chapter**

Pages that look like **this** describe a **method**

When you're in need of clarification...

THIS SHAPE IN THE BOTTOM RIGHT SUMS UP THE MAIN TAKE-AWAYS FROM A PART

When you're in need of direction...

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References in this style are also clickable.

# Glossary

Here you will find an overview of frequently used terms and abbreviations.

<b>All-hands</b>	WeTransfer's biweekly company-wide gathering where important topics are discussed
<b>Brand ambassador (BA)</b>	An employee selected to go on a mission to (internally) advocate for the brand
<b>Brand identification</b>	An employee's feeling of 'emotional oneness' and belonging to the organisation/brand
<b>Brand promise</b>	The value a brand claims to offer its customers
<b>Boundary object</b>	A dynamic artefact meant to facilitate collaboration in complex contexts
<b>Brand citizenship behaviour (BCB)</b>	Employee behaviour that is consistent with the brand and helps deliver the brand promise
<b>Brand commitment</b>	An employee's willingness to achieve brand-related goals
<b>Brand understanding</b>	The cognitive representation of the brand in employees' minds
<b>Employee experience (EX)</b>	An employee's perception of the relationship with their employer derived from all touchpoints along the employee's journey
<b>Employer brand</b>	The brand from the perspective of (potential) employees, describing the value the company offers its people
<b>Freedom within a framework</b>	A theory to maintain employee autonomy by applying the right level of structure
<b>Internal branding</b>	The practice of enabling employees to co-create brand value, by making sure they understand, identify with, commit to and behave in line with the brand
<b>Internal brand alignment</b>	The practice of seeking alignment between employees and the brand
<b>Internal communications</b>	The team that produces and delivers messages within the company and facilitates communication between employees
<b>(Social) learning system</b>	A structure (within an organisation) to make employees engage in, imagine and align on a certain topic
<b>Learning and development (L&amp;D)</b>	The team that is responsible for providing employees with the skills and knowledge to grow individually and as a company
<b>Manifesto</b>	A written statement of beliefs, used to translate the intangible brand assets into articulated guidelines
<b>Magpie</b>	WeTransfer's monthly newsletter
<b>Officevibe</b>	The platform used at WeTransfer to track several employee experience parameters through frequent surveys
<b>Senior leadership team (SLT)</b>	The team that leads WeTransfer, consisting of the heads of departments

# I. Introduction

## The raison d'être of this project

This part introduces how the project came to be. It explains the relevance of the topic in current times, but also the relevance of the topic to the client, WeTransfer. This part also shows the challenge that was formulated at the start of the project. Then, it sheds light on the approach that was taken in the research and design process and how the parts of that process are structured in this report.

### Chapters in this part

1. Context of the project

2. Project approach

**“People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it.”**

SIMON SINEK (TEDX TALKS, 2009, 4:39)

# 1 Context of the project

## What is the relevance?

**Purpose.** It is the matter of the moment in the field of branding and, moreover, in the field of business. Companies and individuals are looking for their ‘why’ en masse (TEDx Talks, 2009). A brand does no longer merely communicate functional benefits (Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002; Hampf & Lindberg-Repo, 2011; Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Schmidt, Ind, & Iglesias, 2021; Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022), but touches upon ideologies and identity (Accenture, 2018; Polman & Winston, 2021; T. Claassen, personal communication, December 22, 2021). Critical customers drive this development, by seeking brands that align with their own values (Accenture, 2018; Aziz, 2020).

With the rise of purpose, another topic emerges amongst brand experts and scholars: the key role of employees as the human engine behind a brand (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016; Garas, Mahran, & Mohamed, 2018; Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022). The realisation that employees are central to co-creating brand value is growing (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016). At this intersection of the

internal and external manifestation of a brand, lies the field of internal branding. Building internal alignment and engagement is necessary for a brand to be deemed authentic - especially in the current age of purpose - both in the eyes of consumers and employees (Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022).

This project is arranged in collaboration with WeTransfer and aims to improve their internal brand alignment, to help employees contribute to a strong and authentic brand. To provide an understanding of the context in which this project was executed, I first zoom into WeTransfer as a company and, specifically, as a brand. Then, the initial challenge that was set for this project is clarified.



# The client: WeTransfer

## THE ORIGIN OF WETRANSFER

### From Dutch start-up to worldwide platform

WeTransfer is an originally Dutch company, founded in Amsterdam back in 2009. Two creatives, Bas Beerens and Nalden, built a tool to solve a problem they frequently came across themselves: sending large files. They support their tool by creating wallpapers for the sake of advertising. They take a unique stance on this, by making their advertisements beautiful and creative rather than annoying and intrusive. In the years to follow, WeTransfer grows rapidly and the word quickly spreads worldwide. The company expands its product portfolio, always keeping the creative community central. This day, WeTransfer employs over 300 people and has about 87 million active users in 190 countries (WeTransfer, 2022a).

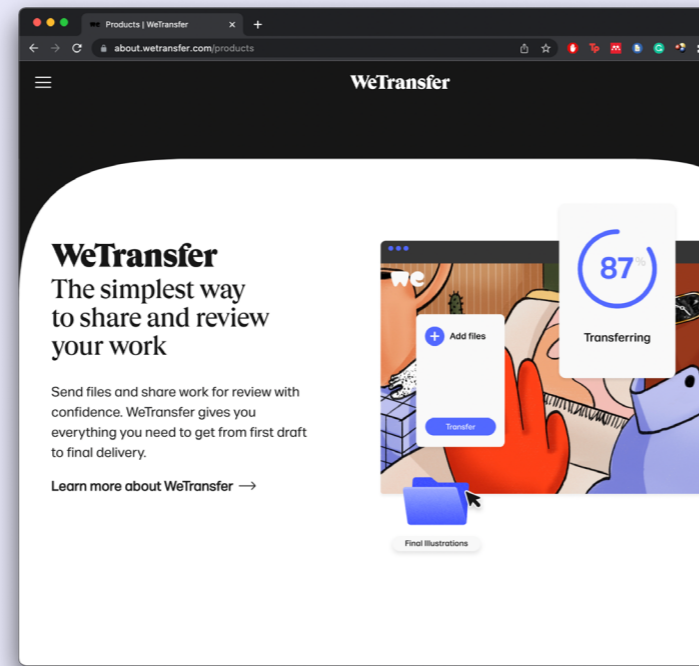


FIGURE 1. WETRANSFER'S WELL-KNOWN FILE-SHARING SERVICE

## THE BUSINESS OF WETRANSFER

### Creativity as a force for good

Most people know WeTransfer merely as a file-sharing company [See Figure 1]. Although this is their core business, the company now offers a full set of creative productivity tools, as well as an editorial art platform (WePresent, 2022). The suite of tools includes WeTransfer, the well-known file transferring tool, Paste, a presentation building tool, Collect, a tool to gather inspiration, and Paper, a drawing tool (WeTransfer, personal communication, 15 February, 2022). Besides helping creatives increase their productivity and form, align and share their ideas, WeTransfer also aims to spread inspiration in the creative community. They do so through WePresent, an online editorial platform that publishes a diverse range of artists (WePresent, 2022) [See Figure 2].



FIGURE 2. WETRANSFER'S EDITORIAL PLATFORM: WEPRESENT

All side activities evolve around - indeed - creativity, such as the company's podcast Influence and the yearly Ideas Report (WeTransfer, 2021a). To back their support for creatives, WeTransfer donates 30% of its advertising space to artists (WeTransfer, 2022a).

WeTransfer expresses the aim to be a force for good. In 2020, WeTransfer first became a certified B Corporation, meaning they meet high standards of balancing out people, planet and profit (B Corporation, 2022). Being a B Corp also means committing to constant improvement on social and environmental performance, as well as transparency and governance. This trickles down to employees' daily conversations and actions [See Figure 3]. The B Corp certification has thus certainly shaped the company into what it is today.



FIGURE 3. WETRANSFERIANS CLEANING AMSTERDAM'S CANALS

## THE BRAND OF WETRANSFER

### Behind every great idea

WeTransfer uses both its brand book, directed mostly at external communications (WeTransfer, personal communication, 15 February, 2022), and its Notion page, which is used as a communicative platform within the company (WeTransfer Notion, personal communication, 10 March, 2022), to pin down their brand assets [See Appendix B: Brand description for elaboration on the company values and purpose].

Central to the brand is WeTransfer's ambition to **be behind every great idea**. The business is built to support ideas in every form or shape, with a product offering of **beautifully obvious tools** that support the mission: to help bring your ideas to life. These tools - **WeTransfer, Paper, Paste and Collect** - are part of the branded house called WeTransfer. WeTransfer believes in the mantra

**of people first, creativity second, and technology third.**

The brand values, as described in the brand book, shape everything that the brand puts out. These values are **freedom, simplicity, creativity and humanity**.

In addition to the brand values, that are externally directed, WeTransfer holds company values that are supposed to steer the internal culture:

- We enable: we empower everyone to do their best work.
- We all own it: we are proactive and we all take responsibility for moving things forward
- We're optimistic: we are enthusiastic about our work and believe in the people around us
- We're inclusive: we are proudly defined by diversity - of people, ideas and products



LA RAISON D'ÊTRE DE WETRANSFER

What Gordon says

A week after I started working at WeTransfer as a graduate intern, the company's CEO Gordon Willoughby [See Figure 4] sent out an email to every employee. The reason for writing was the question a new employee had asked him: why does WeTransfer exist? In this message, Gordon describes the raison d'être following the structure of Simon Sinek's golden circle (TEDx Talks, 2009). The CEO's perspective is summarised in Figure 5 (G. Willoughby, personal communication, January 4, 2022).

A note should be made that Gordon stepped down as CEO during this project. The consequences are discussed more in-depth in *Chapter 16: Discussion*.



FIGURE 5. GORDON WILLOUGHBY'S TAKE ON WETRANSFER'S BRAND

FIGURE 4. GORDON WILLOUGHBY - (FORMER) WETRANSFER CEO



USERS OF WETRANSFER

Targeting creative minds

A significant part of the brand is the user base that the products and services target. Previous paragraphs made it clear that WeTransfer aims to support creativity and ideas - but who for? A study conducted to get to know WeTransfer's users better employs personas to break down the target groups (WeTransfer, 2021b). All in all, the target audience is described as creative professionals. These people are specialised in visual or auditory crafts. They work individually or in teams at the request of others, who might be external clients or internal stakeholders. The work happens for a large part on a project basis. The way of working of creative professionals comes with the need to manage several projects simultaneously and to keep clients updated, all the while retaining the creative spirit. WeTransfer plays into this need by offering a set of tools that minimises distractions and disruptions, to maximise creativity (WeTransfer Notion, personal communication, 12 March, 2022).

# The challenge: internal brand alignment

WeTransfer strongly exhibits care for society and the world. As a part of this, they value good treatment of their own employees. To that end, an employee experience team was appointed in 2021. Looking at Glassdoor reviews, the company is already doing well in this aspect (2022). But their ambition reaches further: WeTransfer internally shares the goal to become a certified Great Place To Work (WeTransfer Notion, personal communication, 3 May, 2022). As a part of its strategy to do so, the company aims to integrate the story the brand tells externally in the experience it delivers to its employees. This is important for two reasons.

Firstly, from an employee experience perspective, WeTransfer wants to deliver its brand promise to its employees and walk the talk regarding brand values. In other words: what the company preaches externally should be reflected by what employees experience internally. Achieving such alignment has proven to result in higher well-being and job satisfaction amongst employees (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016; Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali, 2021). Secondly, from a brand management perspective and for the sake of brand authenticity, WeTransfer's employees should support the brand values and be able and willing to behave in ways that suit the brand promise (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016; Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022). Building internal support for the brand will increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012).

This outlines the challenge that set this project into motion [See Figure 6] [See Appendix A: Approved project brief for the initially formulated challenge]:

**to align employees and their experience with the WeTransfer brand, to make for an authentic organisation with happy and fulfilled customers and, moreover, employees.**



FIGURE 6. THE CHALLENGE FOR THIS PROJECT

## Welcome to the same page

Introducing portals and reviews



# 2 Project approach

For this project, it is important to truly understand the context and specifically, the company and its employees. Consequently, to create value for the client, a way to improve the situation should be proposed. These two steps are reflected in the design approach I took for this project.

The steps of the process are grounded in the Double Diamond, a method universally utilised in design processes (Ball, 2019). The first half focuses on the problem space, aiming to understand the context in order to define the challenge. The second half entails the solution space, aiming to design a proposal that offers a solution for the defined challenge. Consequently, five phases were completed: Background, Research, Strategy, Design and Implementation. These phases correspond with the parts of this report, as shown on the right. The Strategy part describes the tipping point between problem space and solution space.

To build **background** knowledge, the theory and practice of internal branding is explored.

## II. Background

To understand the situation and the people at WeTransfer, empirical **research** is conducted.

## III. Research

To move from research to design, the design challenge is formulated and translated into a **strategy**.

## IV. Strategy

To illustrate the strategy, a **design** proposal is developed and validated.

## V. Design

To move towards execution of the solution, an **implementation** plan is created.

## VI. Implementation

PROBLEM SPACE

SOLUTION SPACE

### TAKEAWAYS PART I. INTRODUCTION

- With the rise of purpose in the field of branding, **employees** play an increasingly important role in **co-creating brand value**.
- WeTransfer is a **B Corp** tech company that offers a set of **productivity tools for creatives**.
- WeTransfer has the mission to **bring great ideas to life** and values **freedom, creativity, humanity and simplicity** in their products. Their internal culture is defined by the following values: **we enable, we all own it, we're optimistic and we're inclusive**.
- The challenge of this project is to **improve internal brand alignment** at WeTransfer, to make for an **authentic** organisation with **happy employees and customers**.

# II. Background

[Background](#)[Research](#)[Strategy](#)[Design](#)[Implementation](#)

## Exploration of the theory and practice of internal branding

This part presents a literature review on the topic of internal brand management. First, theoretical views on internal branding are explored to come to a working definition that will be employed during the project. Then, the practice of internal branding is studied. Questions that will be discussed are: what can be learned from real-life examples of internal branding? Why would a company engage in internal branding? And: what activities does internal branding consist of?

**Chapters in this part**[3. Internal branding in theory](#)[4. Internal branding in practice](#)[5. Stages of internal branding](#)

# Method

## Literature review

To form a well-rounded understanding of what internal branding is, how it is applied and ultimately how to best put it to use in this project, a combination of three methods is used to retrieve information:



A **literature study** is conducted to create insight into current academic perspectives on popular definitions and on the components and objectives of internal branding. Roughly 40 journal articles and 5 books were sourced in the literature study. The review was focused on internal branding and related search areas, such as 'corporate branding', 'employer branding' and 'employee experience'.



**Consultation with experts** in the field of internal branding is held to create a nuanced understanding of different (opposing) perspective within the field. These three experts all are involved with internal branding from a different viewpoint. The experts have a background in respectively brand strategy (T. Claasen, Strategy Director at Havas Lemz), company culture (K. de Kruijf, Business Coach and Trainer at SpaarneCoaching) and internal branding (O. Iglesias, Associate Professor and Head at the Marketing Department ESADE).



**Case studies** and **best practices** helped to get a grip on how internal branding is applied in practice, what companies typically struggle with and how internal branding can contribute to the success of organisations.

# 3 Internal branding in theory

## Views on internal branding

Since internal branding has gained relevance, the term is defined by several writers in the academic field. Despite their differences, all definitions share a common component: Internal branding is about bringing employees and brand values closer together (Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009; Punjaisri, Wilson, & Evanschitzky, 2009; Saleem & Iglesias, 2016).

However, subtle distinctions uncover opposing views on the concept, especially in terms of the starting point of the internal branding process and the role of employees. See [Appendix C: Views on internal branding](#) for an overview of differing definitions. Whereas some definitions imply that delivering the brand promise to customers should be the starting point and employees should be mobilised to do so (Punjaisri et al., 2009; Morhart et al., 2009), others take an inside-out approach, taking the internal culture as a starting point and regarding employees as active co-creators of brand value (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016). As this project aims to bring this theory into practice, it is obvious that a standpoint must be taken and that it must be determined which of these views to adopt - that suits the challenge and context set for this project. In the next part of this chapter, I argue what perspective will be leading. For this, literature, expert views and my own vision are integrated.

## Taking a stance toward internal branding

My standpoint is constructed by the sum of three statements, that together build up to the definition of internal branding that will be employed in the course of this project. To read the elaboration on these statements, see [Appendix D: Elaboration on taking a stance](#).

### Statement 1: Brands are dynamic and co-created by nature

A new stream of research defines brands as fluid, dynamic entities that are co-created (Iglesias & Alfaro, 2013; Beverland, 2018; Iglesias & Ind, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2021; O. Iglesias, personal communication, December 16, 2021). That means that a brand is ever-evolving and every decision of an employee somehow influences the brand. Every individual contributes to the identity of the company as a whole.

### Statement 2: Brands are increasingly purpose-driven and ideological

As described in the introduction of this report, the value of brands has evolved from purely functional, to experiential, to ideological [See [Appendix E: The evolution of brands](#)]. Currently, the purpose of existing has become central to a brand (Accenture, 2018; Polman & Winston, 2021; T. Claassen, personal communication, December 22, 2021).

### Statement 3: Employees should be at the centre of reasoning

Employee experience (EX) is a perspective, characterised by putting employees at the centre of reasoning, that has gained ground over the past years (Plaskoff, 2017; Gallup, n.d.). Whereas internal branding mostly focuses on educating employees about the brand and making sure they connect to it to be able to consistently deliver the brand promise, delivering the brand promise to employees is equally important.

## A working definition of internal branding

How does internal branding fit this emerging understanding of brands, combined with the proposed employee-centred perspective? The purpose-driven movement asks for employees' authentic commitment to the brand (T. Claassen, personal communication, December 22, 2021). Also, according to the emerging understanding of the concept of brands, it is appropriate to take an approach that empowers employees to co-create brand value (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016). The EX perspective underpins this reasoning to put employees centrally.

Looking back at the definitions given in literature, the one of Saleem & Iglesias (2016) is best in line with this take on internal branding, as they honour the co-creative nature of a brand and the need for employee empowerment. I still want to emphasise that the reasoning for employees to contribute to the brand should be authentic and intrinsic. The working definition that forms the starting point for further research and design is formulated as follows:

**The essence of internal branding is to unlock employees' intrinsic motivation to co-create brand value.**



# 4 Internal branding in practice

Now that the working definition clarifies the approach toward internal branding that will be leading for this project, it is interesting to see what is known about the practical sides of internal branding. To start off, two actual examples from practice are discussed. These case studies are used to illustrate the objectives and components of internal branding later on.

CASE STUDY

## Unilever

An example that shows how doing good for the world means doing good in business

### What did Unilever do?

Unilever showed how building an organisation that is aligned on and led by its purpose can result in both internal and external benefits. Paul Polman - former CEO of Unilever - and Andrew Winston (2021) wrote a book to describe the net positive model. For a company to be net positive means to give more than you take. The freshness of the net positive perspective is in showing that purpose can be good for business, too. Purpose-driven companies enjoy higher shareholder returns, higher levels of innovation, better employee retention and faster growth (p. 86). To become purpose-driven, Polman and Winston emphasise the importance of strong leadership, aimed at inspiring and uniting people internally (p. 58). Unilever regards employees centric to building a strong 'external' brand, because "if you have to change a brand in the consumers' minds, you have to change it in employees' minds first" (p. 72). The organisation intends to do so by giving their workers purpose training, but also by helping them find their individual purpose (p.

77, p. 86). Since Unilever has initiated its Unilever Sustainable Living Plan, which was created in 2010 with the purpose to focus on the long term, the company claims to have improved its talent attraction and retention (Unilever, 2020). The increase in stock value since 2010 gives reason to believe Unilever's strategy has had a positive effect on business results, too (Google Finance, 2022).

### What are the learnings?

Unilever's example pleads a business case for purpose-drivenness and internal alignment. The net positive approach gives insight into how purpose and profit don't have to bite each other, but can exist as a symbiosis. The previously mentioned internal and external incentives for practising internal branding find proof in this case study. All in all, employees drive purpose and purpose pays off.

## CASE STUDY

## IKEA

An example that shows how **strong ideologies, leadership and communication can respect cultural differences throughout communities while staying aligned on the core**

## What did IKEA do?

When IKEA expanded its business by entering China and Russia, the company faced a cultural challenge. The inherent differences between employees at, for example, the headquarters in Sweden and employees joining the companies in these new locations could not be ignored. Tarnovskaya & De Chernatony (2011) describe how, in order to retain a feeling of togetherness in the company, IKEA's managers needed to take on the facilitation of collective sense-making of the brand in the local context. IKEA's vision - 'to create a better everyday life for the many people' - is applicable to people and households all over the world (Tarnovskaya & de Chernatony, 2011; IKEA, 2022). But, as Tarnovskaya & De Chernatony (2011) explain in their case study, to make Chinese and Russian employees feel at home in their new professional environment, the local managers delved into the cultural values. Then, these managers sought to find a common ground between core brand values

and country values. For example, Chinese managers expressed traditional local values like collectivism, respect for authority and money orientation and connected these to IKEA's ideologies (amongst which are togetherness, leading by example and cost-consciousness).

## What are the learnings?

It is interesting to see how IKEA takes an employee perspective, by finding a healthy mix of cultural and corporate values. This is a typical example of how a company might play into intrinsic reasons for employees to stand behind the brand values and make them feel comfortable within the company culture. This case shows that, while the framing of values might differ across cultures, the core should always stay consistent. The key is to help employees identify themselves in relation to the brand.

## THE AIM OF INTERNAL BRANDING

## A happy and healthy business

A company could have several incentives to invest in internal branding. Whereas some envision an internally focused outcome of internal branding, others rather imagine externally focused benefits (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016). In the design phase of this project, the internal and external objectives of internal branding should be considered to assess the value of the solution for WeTransfer.

An internally oriented reason could be to enhance employees' experience at their job and connection to the company. Indeed, literature shows that employees are more likely to be satisfied and remain at their job when internal branding efforts are successfully applied (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011; Saleem & Iglesias, 2016). These efforts have the capacity to build powerful team culture, consisting of loyal people who feel like they belong to and contribute to an impactful organisation (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011; Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali, 2021). Also, employees will be able to indicate how they contribute to the bigger picture and perceive their employer's brand as authentic. To learn more about role clarity and employee perceived authenticity, see [Appendix F: Related concepts](#).

On top of that, internal branding can achieve positive results that are more externally focused. If the roles that teams and individuals have in pursuing the purpose are clear, the brand promise will be well delivered and eventually, the business will be able to thrive in customer experience and relationships (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011; Tarnovskaya & de Chernatony, 2011; Iglesias & Alfaro, 2013). As illustrated by the Unilever case, a company internally aligned on purpose has a higher chance to do well in business.

## THE ELEMENTS OF INTERNAL BRANDING

## Bring the brand to life

The IKEA case shows that to manage internal branding well, a mix of internal activities is employed. Saleem and Iglesias (2016) reflect on existing literature to build a conceptual framework, describing internal branding as consisting of five components. These components vary in abstraction and interaction, as should the elements of the final solution created in this project for WeTransfer.

### Brand ideologies

A clear mission and vision and shared values are fundamental to internal branding. The ideologies must go hand in hand with an organisational culture that reflects them.

### Brand leadership

People within a company with a leading role can contribute greatly to internal brand understanding, which is essential to achieving brand identification and commitment (see [Chapter 5: Stages of internal branding](#)). Besides building understanding, there is a role for leadership in inspiring others to live up to the brand vision.

### Brand centred HRM

Internal branding relies fully on the people inside a company, which is why managing human resources is essential for aligning the brand internally and externally. Employees must be selected on their fit to the brand and trained to develop themselves accordingly.

### Internal brand communication

Just like leadership, internal communication can help employees know what the brand is and inspire them to commit to it. Both informal and formal ways of communication matter. Brand-related information can be spread by people appointed to do so, but additionally, by any other employee.


### Internal brand communities

When people who support the brand connect, brand communities are formed. This happens amongst consumers as well as amongst employees. Within virtual or physical brand communities, crucial contributions to brand co-creation are made.



# 5 Stages of internal branding

To align the brand, as articulated and externally communicated by a company, with internal stakeholders, the latter must move successfully through four stages: brand understanding, brand identification, brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour. Framing the practice of internal branding this way suits the working definition in this project and translates it into practical steps. Instead of merely focusing on aligning employees' behaviour with the brand, a more thorough approach is taken to build an intrinsic drive within employees that makes them genuinely want to, in the end, show brand-aligned behaviour.

  
See the next spread for an overview of the stages of internal branding

## TAKEAWAYS

### PART II.

#### BACKGROUND

- For the remainder of this project, I will work from the standpoint that the core practice of internal branding is to **unlock employees' intrinsic motivation to co-create brand value**.
- Internal branding can help internally - by improving **employee satisfaction, retention, loyalty and role clarity** - and externally - by improving **brand promise delivery, brand authenticity and customer experience**.
- Internal brand management entails a **mix of internal activities** with varying abstraction and interaction levels.
- For internal brand alignment, employees must **(1) understand the brand, (2) identify with the brand and (3) commit to the brand to eventually (4) behave according to the brand**.

# Stages of internal branding

## understand the brand



Before being able to connect to the brand values and purpose, employees must in the first place understand what they are. The cognitive representation of the brand in employees' minds should be consistent and shared by all individuals (Piehler et al., 2016).

## identify with the brand



Then, the question is if the company brand resonates with employees' personal values and drivers. If so, employees will identify with the brand. They will feel a sense of 'emotional oneness' and belonging to the organisation (Helm, Renk, & Mishra, 2016; Piehler et al, 2016; Saleem & Iglesias, 2016;).

## commit to the brand



In the next stage, the sense of belonging can translate to psychological attachment and, moreover, willingness to achieve brand goals, called brand commitment (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016).

## behave like the brand



If employees understand, identify with and commit to the brand, they will move to an authentic stage of brand citizenship behaviour (BCB): this is where employees show behaviour that is consistent with the brand. Through this behaviour, the brand promise can be delivered and the brand can be strengthened (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016). Piehler (2018) further divides BCB into three levels:

- **Brand compliance:** employees follow brand-related (implicit or explicit) ways and principles
- **Brand endorsement:** employees consciously espouse and advocate for the brand
- **Brand development:** employees encourage developments to improve the delivery of the brand promise (for example: through improving customer experience)

# III. Research

Background

**Research**

Strategy

Design

Implementation

## Investigation of the current internal brand alignment at WeTransfer

To understand how things are currently going at WeTransfer, empirical research is conducted. This part first describes the aim of the research, summarised in a research goal and a set of research questions. Then, an overview of the research set-up, the method, is given. Finally, the findings are shared and recurring themes are identified and discussed in depth.

# 6 Research objectives

## Research goal

To be able to improve internal branding efforts at WeTransfer, the theoretical insights should be complemented with research on the context. I should first map out what the current situation is and where the company stands now in terms of internal branding (see *Chapter 5: Stages of internal branding*). A research goal is formulated as a baseline for the research plan to follow.

The research goal is to **define the gap between the articulated WeTransfer brand and employees' core [1] drivers and [2] experiences in their work.**

**Define the gap** Because internal branding is all about alignment, between the brand and the employees, it is key to define the current misalignments first (Piehler et al., 2016; Saleem & Iglesias, 2016; Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022).

**The articulated WeTransfer brand** The way that the company positions itself, both internally and externally, is viewed as the articulated brand. The articulated brand entails the values and purpose, as described in the section '*The client: WeTransfer*' in *Chapter 1: Context of the project*.

**Employees core drivers and experiences** As explained previously, the brand promise must be delivered both by and to the employees. That is why two things are taken into consideration: [1] what is it that drives employees and [2] what do employees experience at WeTransfer.

To translate this research goal into targeted questions, it is broken down according to the earlier discussed theory (Agee, 2005). The stages of internal branding shape the research questions intended to determine employees' drivers. To also put attention to the element of employee experience, an additional research question is included.

## Research questions

### BRAND UNDERSTANDING

How does employees' perception of the WeTransfer brand differ from the intended perception?

### BRAND IDENTIFICATION

To what extent, why and when do employees (not) feel a sense of belonging to the WeTransfer brand?

### BRAND COMMITMENT

To what extent, why and when do employees (not) feel attached and do they commit to the WeTransfer values and purpose?

### BRAND CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR

To what extent, why and where are employee behaviour and WeTransfer's brand promise and values (not) aligned?

### EMPLOYEE BRAND EXPERIENCE

To what extent, why and where are employee experience and WeTransfer's brand promise and values (not) aligned?



# Method

## Empirical research

### Conducting the research

Studying the internal perceptions, experiences and manifestations of the WeTransfer brand calls for exploration of both the individuals' perspectives and the group's culture. The aim is to examine how employees individually see and relate to the brand, but also to see what social phenomena are occurring internally that may or may not reflect brand values. To gain insights into individuals' drivers and experiences and at the same time immerse in the company culture, a predominantly qualitative research approach suits best. Qualitative methods deal with the complexity of a situation and recognise a focus on the individual meaning - which is favourable since, in internal branding, the concept of the brand in employees' minds is central (Creswell, 2014; Piehler et al., 2016). Different methods are mixed to build a deep understanding of the situation, as described below [See Figure 7].

First of all, existing data from WeTransfer is analysed. WeTransfer already frequently conducts **qualitative and quantitative research**. Valuable parts of this data are used to create an initial understanding of the situation, but also as a means to compare and pin down new research findings afterwards.

**Qualitative interviewing** is used in two rounds. The first round is meant to collect in-depth, detailed information about employees' perceptions, feelings, thoughts and experiences (Creswell, 2014). These interviews bring forth the key collection of data, which is further fine-tuned and supported by the other research

methodologies. The interview guide comes forth from the theoretical framework that was introduced in *Chapter 5: Stages of internal branding*. The second round is conducted with internal experts in order to follow up and fill any gaps.

To allow even deeper insight into the company culture, but also to pick up information in employees' natural environment that they for some reason do not explicitly mention in an interview setting, I adopt an ethnographic approach (Cain, 2003; Creswell, 2014). More specifically, the method of **corporate ethnography**, which has recently gained popularity, provides an "examination of a corporate culture and its worldview" (Cain, 2003; Emerald Publishing, n.d.). Immersing myself optimally in the company culture is best done by exploiting my first-hand experiences as a new employee. This builds a holistic understanding of the organisational culture, which in turn can open up to comprehension of the internal brand (Cain, 2003).

In *Appendix G: Research design in detail*, all three components of the research design are explained more elaborately.

### Analysing the results

In order to distil valuable insights from the qualitative data, a coding process is executed. Coding means to group, regroup and relink data, in order to find patterns and consolidate meaning and explanation for these patterns (Saldaña, 2013). To this end, every interview was transcribed and from this transcript, interesting sections were highlighted [See *Appendix cB: Transcripts | Round 1 interviews*]. These sections were consequently coded. Also, additional qualitative data out of the auto-ethnography functioned to refine the coding structure along the way. By coding the quotes thematically, I was able to bring to light repetitive patterns and consistencies in the data (Saldaña, 2013). In *Appendix L: Coding themes*, the complete overview of themes/labels can be found.

With the insights that rolled out of this coding process, the research questions can be answered (see *Appendix M: Answering research questions*). However, it is more interesting to look at the recurring themes that transcend the boundaries of the research questions. During the coding process, five overarching themes were identified concerning the current state of internal branding at WeTransfer. As a last step of the analysis, company growth is described as a common thread throughout the themes. Diving deeper into the common thread helps uncover the roots of problems that show up at surface level. The development of this deep understanding creates a promising starting point for the generation of solutions.

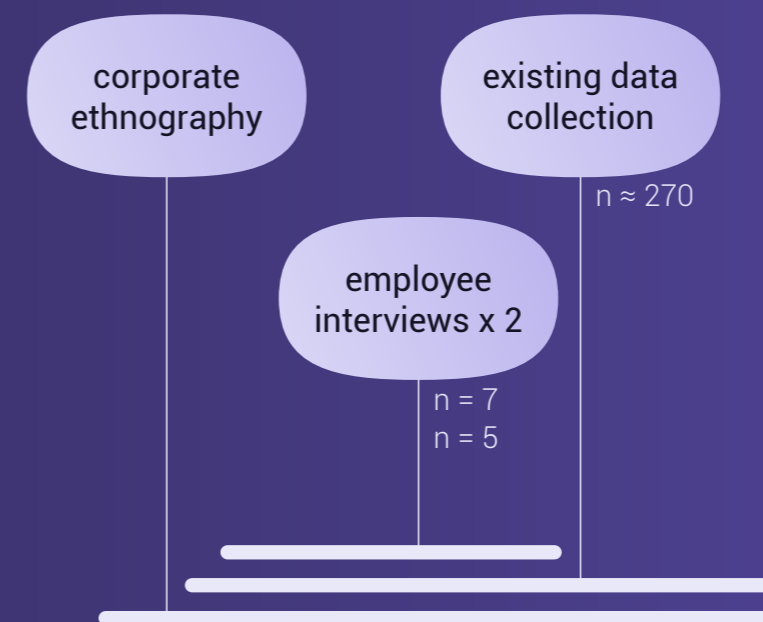


FIGURE 7. OVERVIEW OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHODS

# 7 Research results

## Interpretation of findings

During the data analysis as described in the *'Method'* section, five relevant themes cropped up. These overarching themes describe observed phenomena at WeTransfer that are related to internal brand alignment. The phenomena are underlaid by urgency and insecurity and can therefore lead to either threats or opportunities (Jackson & Dutton, 1988). That means that if they are paid attention to and handled right, they can be great opportunities for improvement. If they

are ignored, however, they might pose a risk for WeTransfer (as explained in the upcoming sections).

The five themes are discussed one by one in the following section. Every theme is first described through the **research findings**. To do so, it is laid out what is happening and what risk or threat comes with the phenomenon. Second, every theme is described through **interpretation** of the research findings, by connecting the outcomes to literature. The interpretation aims to deepen the challenge that comes with the phenomenon and why it is important to tackle that challenge.

## 1 The question of creativity

### Research findings

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

#### Fragmented understanding of creativity

When being asked what WeTransfer stands for as a company, every single employee will mention the word 'creativity'. One could say this reflects a good brand understanding. However,

employee interviews unveil a fragmented understanding of the concept of creativity. For some, creativity means freedom in the creative process, also within WeTransfer. For others, the ultimate form of creativity is making. Some connect creativity inherently to making an impact, as in creating opportunities. And then there are people who see creativity as being bold with ideas and being different, which is characteristic of WeTransfer's culture. In short, creativity has been stretched and eventually become a shattered concept.

“We kind of lack focus in those ways and that is I think why we have a little bit of a vaguer purpose to keep us together.”

WHAT IS THE RISK OR THREAT?

#### A lack of unity

One interviewee mentions that they feel the purpose could be weaponised and forced to fit individual needs that do not necessarily comply with company needs. For example, employees expect a considerable amount of freedom in decision-making, because that is how they interpret creativity. However, as another interviewee stresses, this is not always in the best interest of the company. As discussed with - amongst others - brand managers in the second round of interviews, a similar struggle occurs with other values that accompany the purpose. Intentions that lie at the base of the values and purpose are not always clearly articulated and risk fading away. Some say WeTransfer feels like multiple companies at once.

“It'd be contradictory if they were a creative company and they don't let their employees have freedom in the creative process.”



## Interpretation

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

### Build deep brand understanding

Brand compliance - the part of brand citizenship behaviour that describes behaviour matching the 'brand rules' - can only be reached if these brand rules are clear to everybody and more specifically if employees know how the brand relates to their individual roles (King & Grace, 2010; Piehler, 2018). At WeTransfer, we see that the term 'creativity' encompasses such a broad array of things, that it is not clear and guiding enough - and that the same goes for other values. Employees' understanding of the WeTransfer brands should be taken to the next level, in order to create a solid base for strategy building, role division, way of working and other actions and behaviour (Piehler et al., 2016). The challenge here is to be more articulate about what the purpose and the values entail for employees personally, without taking away from the inspiring aspect and the possibility to make it your own (Schmidt et al., 2021).

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

### Guidance to create unity

In the context of a growing organisation, encompassing more and more different personalities and cultures, brand understanding becomes increasingly difficult to achieve (Tarnovskaya & De Chernatony, 2011). For WeTransfer, that means now is the time to get everybody on the same page and to prevent further fragmentation. There is a need to synchronise the cognitive representation of the WeTransfer brand, in the minds of individual employees (Piehler et al., 2016). Guiding employees in the right direction is a way to have more impact, because employees will be better able to behave in line with organisational values (Karanges et al., 2018).

## 2 Purpose versus business

### Research findings

#### WHAT IS HAPPENING?

#### Tension between purpose and business

Mid-January, WeTransfer's CEO internally announced WeTransfer's intention to float (IPO). However, it later became apparent that market conditions were too volatile to proceed. The situation spotlighted the weigh-off between purpose and business. Although most employees knew that going IPO should be a good sign of growth, there were also concerns. Employees express the hope that WeTransfer stays true to its core - and, even after the intention to float is drawn back, this sentiment is still present. Long-term employees indicate a shift in focus, happening already.

In diverse situations, the tension between purpose and business objectives is coming to light. Interviewees give several examples of the matter. WeTransfer says it cares for well-being, but schedules are too cramped to show

**“That’s my worry as well. Are we going to stay this sort of company forever and really give back to the community, or not?”**

up at well-being workshops and there are high expectations of performance. WeTransfer says it exists to support creatives, but wallpapers increasingly demonstrate product ads instead of creative work. WeTransfer says we put people first, now and always, but burn-out rates are high and business targets gain prominence. WeTransfer says it values sustainability, but its main business still relies heavily on carbon emissions.

**“If at some point they need to do something for economical gain, then I’m not sure if that will move some of their values, like what I’ve been seeing in the last year.”**

#### WHAT IS THE RISK OR THREAT?

#### Losing purpose-driven workers

The research indicates that generally, WeTransfer employees have a clear vision of why they do their job, other than just to make a living. If these purpose-driven employees have the perception that WeTransfer is putting more focus on business objectives, this could have unfavourable consequences. People who feel WeTransfer's identity and purpose are fading might move on to another job. As employees phrase it, 'cool people are leaving'.

### Interpretation

#### WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

#### Educate on the bigger picture

The solution to this tension is not to ignore business targets altogether or to deny the intention to make profit, which is accurately illustrated by Unilever's case (see *Chapter 4: Internal branding in practice*). What is crucial is to be transparent and create clarity on considerations, especially in times when employees start to become more critical (Schmidt et al., 2021). The challenge is to make everybody conscious of how daily activities and objectives relate to the bigger picture (K. de Kruijf, personal communication, December 20).

#### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

#### Meaning attracts

WeTransfer has built a strong brand: they don't deal in megabytes, they deal in ideas. The bigger picture of creativity, along with the perception that this is a company that actually wants to make a positive impact, is what draws employees

to come work here and what differentiates WeTransfer from its main competitors, such as Dropbox. Being clear about the relationship between decisions and activities and the common purpose will not only inspire employees to do better work but also allow them to help deliver the brand promise to users (Sultan, 2021). Besides that, the newest generation of workers particularly looks for a job that is meaningful to them (Aziz, 2020). Purpose can be a powerful tool to keep attracting new talent, especially in the turbulent times of the great resignation (WeTransfer, 2021a).





## 3 Practise what you pride

### Research findings

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

#### Pride outshines realism

The interviewed employees make several claims that point toward brand pride, directly but also indirectly. For example, there is a habit of comparing WeTransfer to other (similar, tech) companies to show WeTransfer's own strength. Also, employees gladly endorse the brand by telling others about their work at WeTransfer. Both are proven signs of brand pride (Helm et al., 2016). However, some respondents point out that this tendency to pride WeTransfer has a downside too, which is a lack of realism.

**“There are very few companies that have done it [responsible travel policy] before, and so I’m really proud of them setting their eye on that even though it’s going to be really hard.”**

WHAT IS THE RISK OR THREAT?

#### Blinded by the ideal image

Respondents repeatedly express how important they find it that WeTransfer ‘walks the talk’. Although most employees agree that WeTransfer does genuinely try to follow up words with actions, there is also a sentiment that there is more talking than doing. Some hold the perspective that optimism at times can result in turning a blind eye to subjects where improvements should be made. As an example, an interviewee mentions that although WeTransfer stores its files on an environment-unfriendly web server, this matter is rarely discussed.



### Interpretation

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

#### Stay grounded and critical

The tension between pride and realism can be explained by the distinction between the ideal and the actual concept of self (Helm et al., 2016). The concept that precedes pride is the congruity of the ideal self and the brand. In other words: who do I want to be, and how does that fit the brand? The great sense of brand pride shows that WeTransfer's brand is in line with who employees aspire to be. However, it is at least equally important that employees are aware of their actual self, and even of the actual WeTransfer (Helm et al., 2016). A balance needs to be sought

between envisioning the ideal image and critically reflecting on reality. To facilitate brand citizenship behaviour, but also to make brand understanding more accurate, employees should be educated about the ideal and actual situation (Helm et al., 2016). For this, an understanding of the actual self of individuals and of the actual position of the company should function as input.

**“WeTransfer’s a very Amsterdam company, like Ajax, you know we boast, we’re arrogant. We think we’re the best; but also we gotta score too, you know.”**

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

#### Willingness and ability

Brand pride is in essence a beneficial asset since it increases employees' willingness to deliver the brand promise (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). However, it is important to balance that pride with realism to also increase employees' ability to deliver the brand promise (i.e. show brand citizenship behaviour). In order to achieve brand citizenship behaviour, it is necessary that the actual self of the employee fits the WeTransfer brand (Helm et al., 2016).



## 4 Shift of scale

### Research findings

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

#### Scaling culture

WeTransfer is expanding rapidly. Around 150 new people were hired in 2021 and the recruitment experts confirm that, if everything goes as planned in 2022, the upward trend will continue. WeTransfer is in the midst of a transition period from a small-scale business to a big player. Experienced employees look back at the good old times with melancholy. On the other hand, people are excited to be part of such a special time and thrive under the dynamics. A shift is happening and the growth no longer allows the startup vibe to stay unchanged. More structure is applied and the many new faces are hard to keep up with. Some say decision-making is way too decentralised, others complain that they are losing autonomy in the creative process. Some employees fear further growth; they are concerned that 'all the cool people' will leave and the 'good vibe' will fade with growth. At the same time, ambitions to gain ground and reach more users are also strong.

On the other hand, there is a risk in letting growth drive the company. Several employees express their concern about WeTransfer becoming too corporate or impersonal. They recognise that structure is needed, but too much hierarchy could result in tedious decision-making processes and threaten creativity.

**“It’s exciting and sort of what I’m here for: all that action. All the confusion that comes with it.”**

WHAT IS THE RISK OR THREAT?

#### Too loose or too tight

If nothing is done, respondents expect the company to end up in a chaotic and messy situation. A lack of structure can cause fragmentation if people are subject to too much autonomy and too little connectivity and are unable to look further than their own team or domain, as some say is already happening.

**“The one thing that stood out to me at WeTransfer was, and I don’t know if it’s because of just the stage of growth it’s in or what, it felt very disjointed.”**

### Interpretation

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

#### Find the golden mean

We can conclude that neither of the two extremes is desirable for WeTransfer. Or, put otherwise: there is a need for both. The challenge is to find a way to retain the desirable parts, but tailor them to fit the bigger size WeTransfer is growing into (Hancock, 2019). Chaos is needed for creativity, employees should feel like they are in a space without limits and be inspired to share and pursue ideas. But, importantly, to actually realise these ideas and make an impact, a certain amount of structure and decisiveness is needed. The right combination of both has the potential to make WeTransfer the example of a big player with an authentic culture (Schmidt et al., 2021).

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

#### Keep it together

To keep employees' perceived brand authenticity high, brand values should be reflected in the employee experience (EX). In a small-scale culture, brand values are relatively naturally present in the EX. But growth asks for a more thorough approach to keep aligning the brand with the EX (Brand Culture, n.d.). Aspects like expressing creativity, being able to make an impact and building personal connections are key motivations for employees to work at WeTransfer. This alone should be reason enough to work to retain these values and with them, employees. To cherish certain components of WeTransfer's brand and culture, structure and guidance are precisely what is needed (Gulati, 2018; Schmidt et al., 2021).



# 5 Advocate for the full story

## Research findings

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

### The story needs to be told

Internally, everybody has far and long moved past the idea of WeTransfer as merely a file-sharing service. There is a shared understanding that we are an organisation that supports creativity in the broadest sense and upon that, also wants to make a positive impact in the world. However, employees are struck time after time by the fact that externally, this understanding is still missing and that most (potential) users associate WeTransfer just with file-share.

Although telling others what WeTransfer does over and over again can be a tiring and frustrating process for employees, they still see it as their duty to do so. Employees clearly see they have a

role in educating outsiders on the full WeTransfer story: the full suite of creative products, the other ways in which the company supports the creative community and the ethos around B Corp. Interviewees explain they do this both in and outside their work.

**“If someone asks what WeTransfer is - it sounds like a mantra we say - but we’re not just transfers. We do this, this and this.”**



WHAT IS THE RISK OR THREAT?

### Missed opportunities

If the discrepancy between internal and external understanding of WeTransfer continues to grow, employees might develop a feeling that what they do does not really make a difference. A lack of recognition from the outside world is of great influence on their self-esteem and the confidence they have in their work and in the company. Besides impacting employees' spirit, this tension also prevents WeTransfer from creating value for people to its fullest potential. The reason that employees are so articulate about this topic, is because they believe that educating others on the brand and company could be the key to engaging more people and making a bigger impact. As long as people see WeTransfer as mainly a file-sharing company, the company is not able to support the creative community to the aspired extent.

## Interpretation

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

### Deploy the internal community

Internal branding is a two-way street, that doesn't just call for the internalisation of the brand values, but also for the manifestation of internal values and efforts. When the balance in this process becomes off, a gap between brand image and brand culture comes to exist, pointing to a misunderstanding of WeTransfer's user base (Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022). What is needed at this point, are outward-focused brand efforts (Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022).

Generally, one of WeTransfer's great and strong assets is the loyalty and passion that employees

carry (INvolve, 2021). Also in this issue, they declare to feel a sense of responsibility and desire to tell the world the full WeTransfer story. The challenge, moreover: opportunity, is to enable employees to practise brand endorsement in the most powerful way possible. To do so, they should be equipped to engage with users and be vocal about the company, in order to actively promote the brand to outsiders (Piehler et al., 2016).

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

### Reach the full potential

Internal branding recognises the importance of employees in building brand equity (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016; Garas et al., 2018; Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022). That is, if employees eventually manage to advocate for the brand and to deliver the brand promise (Punjaisri et al., 2019). Then, customer brand understanding and awareness will increase and with that, customers will show more loyalty toward the brand (Shabbir, Khan, & Khan, 2017). Employees for one are determined to make these improvements happen. When thinking of WeTransfer's future, one of the main desires is that the company will be widely known and acknowledged for its efforts.

**“I would hope for WeTransfer to be recognised as a platform that supports creativity end to end and really convey that really well.”**

# The common thread

Zooming out and looking at the described phenomena from a holistic perspective, a common thread becomes visible. Every single tension is subject to an element of change in the company. The growth, and the dynamics in the culture that come with that, bring instability that underlies the phenomena that show at the surface. The challenge in each of the five is to manage perceptions or implications of the changes in WeTransfer. Besides that, every shift or tension will start to play an even bigger role when the company expands further. To apply further focus to the project, it is interesting to dive into this common thread.

## The question of creativity

Under the surface, WeTransfer and its employees seem to share a common set of values. However, as explained earlier, there are differences in how individuals concretely understand these abstract values. This fragmented understanding is sprouting now, but can possibly escalate with further growth. When more people start to work at WeTransfer, the lack of clarity in the brand becomes harder to solve through personal, informal interactions and the need for a planned strategy to improve detailed brand understanding gains urgency. Also, a consequence of this matter can be disconnectivity, especially in combination with an increasing number of employees.

## Purpose versus business

The tension between purpose and business that lives in the minds of employees has come to exist due to and in times of rapid growth. With the expansion of the company come certain business objectives that raise doubts amongst critical employees. Now is the time to make sure that on the one hand, WeTransfer stays true to its purpose and the core that has brought them this growth and that on the other hand, employees understand and trust the interplay between purpose and business.

## Practise what you pride

As WeTransfer moves from a start-up-like company to an established player in the market, it has to develop an even bigger sense of responsibility. The pride and optimism have definitely played their part in taking WeTransfer to this next level. However, to make a real impact now, it is important to reflect on reality and keep improving on the course of events. More eyes will be on what the company does, internally and externally. To retain authenticity, it is crucial to follow up words with actions.

## Shift of scale

Company growth is the essence of this insight, building up the tension between the old small-scale culture and the emerging corporate aspects. WeTransfer is now at the crossroad where careful consideration should be made to balance out freedom and structure. The risk is to get carried away with the success now and focus all attention on further growth. Per contra, the opportunity is to build a culture that combines the existing good parts of WeTransfer with well-structuredness and effective processes to make an actual impact.

## Advocate for the full story

Besides managing perceptions internally throughout dynamic times, it is essential to manage external perceptions too. Moreover, if (potential) users will get a better understanding of the brand, this might drive company success. If employees continue to show the passion and enthusiasm they do now, company growth will also expand the 'army' of potential brand heroes willing to advocate for the full WeTransfer story.

# Growth shakes things up

## TAKEAWAYS PART III. RESEARCH

- The goal of the research was to **define the gap** between the articulated WeTransfer brand and employees' core drivers and experiences in their work.
- Research uncovered five phenomena relating to the internal branding at WeTransfer:
  - Employees' **understanding** of what creativity (and other brand values) mean(s) exactly is **fragmented**
  - Employees experience that the **purpose** of WeTransfer is at times **pressured by business objectives**
  - Employees feel a strong **sense of pride** of the company, but might therefore lack a **realistic look**
  - Employees see the **shift of scale** of the company reflected in changes in the internal culture
  - Employees feel the **full story** of WeTransfer is not sufficiently known externally, but are willing to **advocate for it**
- **Company growth is the common thread** in the phenomena, shaking up the internal culture and brand. Therefore, focusing on the implications and consequences of growth is a good starting point to improve the internal brand alignment.

# IV. Strategy

## Definition of the design challenge and the approach to tackle it

This part describes the transition from research to design. Starting from the common thread found in the research phase (company growth), the project focus is determined and stated in a design goal. The second section of this part introduces a two-step strategy. The strategy is the approach taken to achieve the design goal and will later act as the game plan for designing solutions.

[Background](#)[Research](#)[Strategy](#)[Design](#)[Implementation](#)**Chapters in this part**

8. Design challenge

9. Two-step strategy



# The growth challenge

## Ambidexterity

Now that we have seen how growth impacts WeTransfer's internal brand and culture in several ways, a logical next question is: what is needed to guide the company's internal brand during these times of change? As explained in the research findings, the challenge that comes forth is to find the right balance in certain areas. While standing at this crossroad, WeTransfer should have a good look at which aspects of the organisation they want to cherish and take along in the future, and which aspects they want to advance. Because, when scaling a culture (and an internal brand), it is key to keep the core, but not all the details (Hancock, 2019).

### Brand ambidexterity

A valuable theory to frame this challenge is brand ambidexterity, which is defined as the capacity of a company to retain both consistency (pursuing existing activities and strategies) and relevance (engaging in new activities and strategies). This

approach argues that organisations should not choose either one or the other mode, but find a balance between ensuring continuity and staying relevant through innovations (Beverland, Wilner, & Micheli, 2015). Beverland et al. claim that design thinking could be the key to integrating consistency and relevance, instead of making a trade-off (2015). Also, they argue that to create impactful changes, keeping it to existing activities is not enough and exploration is needed. For the sake of the challenges at WeTransfer, it is helpful to apply the ambidexterity way of thinking to internal brand and culture management. Since the company is in the midst of a transition, it is key to consider which parts of the 'old' way should be maintained and even cherished and, on the other hand, on which parts there should be adaptations or advancements made. The right combination of consistency and relevance can help WeTransfer's brand purpose and values thrive internally.

### An overview of how WeTransfer wants to grow

For this sake, the overview in [Appendix O: Growth ambidexterity](#) captures the key parts WeTransfer should cherish or advance. At the base of this are the insights that come from different data sources, including interviews, ethnography and literature. This figure can give shape to the future changes at WeTransfer and sketches an image of how WeTransfer wants to grow.

# 8 Design challenge

# Focus

## Freedom & guidance

In terms of the ambidexterity efforts that I propose WeTransfer engages in [See [Appendix O: Growth ambidexterity](#)], a major challenge is balancing the continuity of freedom and autonomy and the advancement of guidance and structure within the company [See [Appendix P: Growth ambidexterity | addressed elements](#)]. To ensure quality and depth in the solution, the project is scoped to focus on this balancing act.

A highly appreciated aspect currently at WeTransfer is autonomy. A common concern is that this sense of freedom employees experience will come under pressure as the company expands. However, an understanding is also shared that the necessary structure and guidance will need to be implemented to mature WeTransfer. Especially from an internal branding perspective, a need for more clarity, guidance and direction appears. Interview insights showed that employees are largely aligned in terms of what the company stands for and what the company values, but that the concrete understanding of

these values is different for every individual. Surely, it is desired to give employees the possibility to make company values their own. However, the fragmentation that is now sprouting should be combatted with guidance. That is why the balancing act I will be focusing on is that between **freedom and guidance**.

As Netflix - prided for its responsibility and freedom culture - puts it, freedom could turn into chaos throughout stages of growth. Instead of turning that freedom down altogether by applying a stifling structure, the chaos should be prevented by alignment. That way, employees retain their autonomy and the company retains its agility, while everybody is on the same page regarding what the company values and how that is manifested (Netflix Jobs, n.d.).

Besides the before-mentioned argumentation, another reason to scope the project to balance out freedom and guidance is that this subject strikes a chord with the employees I have spoken to. It is a critical point, with opinions going both ways. While some feel that they already have to compromise on their freedom, others think that too much autonomy puts the connectivity within the company at risk. Tackling this issue can prevent a greater gap to form between employees with contradicting views. Structure (and hierarchy) is one of the most mentioned needs for improvement, but is also one of the most feared changes to accompany WeTransfer's growth. Thus, the stakes to apply structure in a beneficial way, that does not severely impair employees' freedom, are high.

The final motivation to concentrate the project on this tension is that it has much relevance in the current times. A society-wide trend shows that the newer generations of workers, Gen Z and millennials, value flexibility and creativity most highly in the workplace (Deloitte, 2021). More specifically, WeTransfer's employees express these same aspects as important drivers in their work in an internal survey (WeTransfer, 2022b). Both developments contribute to the importance of framing freedom.

# Design goal

To conclude, from here, this project will concentrate on finding the right balance between freedom and guidance, in order to keep the organisation internally aligned throughout its expansion. The guidance entails educating employees on what the abstract values and purpose mean for their work as an individual (K. de Kruijf, personal communication, December 20, 2021; Beverland & Cankurtaran, 2022). That brings me to the following design goal:

I want to **guide employees** in contributing to brand values and purpose in their day-to-day work, while **retaining freedom and autonomy**.

# 9 Two-step strategy

In this chapter, a strategy is developed that aims to achieve the design goal for WeTransfer. This strategy forms a design space for which, in the next stage, more concrete designs can be developed. It describes how the design proposal should guide employees in contributing to brand values and purpose in their day-to-day work, while retaining freedom and autonomy. Two theories are explored that form the backbone of the strategy: Firstly, according to the theory of 'freedom within a framework' it is argued that (and how) the brand should be internally concretised. Secondly, the concept of social learning systems underpins a capacity-building approach to design a long-lasting solution. In the next chapters, an idea is shaped and designed to illustrate how this strategy can be applied in practice.

## Freedom within a framework

As a first step toward generating solutions and to flesh out the design goal, I will dive into a theoretical framework that provides interesting grips on the challenge of guiding employees while retaining their freedom. This approach is called freedom within a framework and is central to understanding how guidance and freedom can go hand in hand in an organisation.

### The framework

Harvard Business Review professor Gulati describes this issue in several case studies (2018). Whereas many leaders feel like they have a choice to make between employee empowerment (freedom) and operational discipline (guidance), Gulati argues that well-designed and well-implemented guidelines can certainly leave room for freedom. In fact, giving clarity of company values and purpose nurtures employees' autonomy to make decisions that support these - by providing context, rather than control (Netflix Jobs, n.d.). This approach is referred to as freedom within a framework and offers a useful method to balance freedom and guidance.

The article proposes three components to this framework (Gulati, 2018) [See Figure 8].

First of all, an overarching **purpose** needs to be defined that captures the company's reason of being and with that, employees' personal motives to do the work that they do.

The purpose is deepened by what the company and employees want to behave like. This is expressed in the **priorities**, as Gulati calls them, also known as core values. Indeed, these values, that echo organisational goals, describe what the company prioritises.

Finally, a set of **principles** is supposed to translate these priorities into employees' day-to-day work. Principles are guidelines that can propose encouragement or limitation of certain behaviour, to help employees act in favour of the company's purpose and values. They should be formulated to apply to different contexts, but provide enough clarity to give direction.

This understanding of freedom within a framework can be of great value for WeTransfer to crystallise abstract values into tangible implications for everyday work. It could outline a space for employees in which they are trusted to take independent decisions in favour of the company. Adopting the framework can help a company improve on all levels of internal branding - understanding, identification, commitment and behaviour [See [Appendix Q: Freedom within a framework in internal branding](#)]. This gives reasons to believe that long-term, thoroughly integrated and sustainable solutions could be generated by basing them on this approach.



## Purpose

Why do we exist?



## Priorities

What do we value?



## Principles

How do we behave?

FIGURE 8. FREEDOM WITHIN A FRAMEWORK

## Freedom within a framework

# Applied to WeTransfer

Now that the approach of freedom within a framework is introduced, it is time to analyse how WeTransfer performs through the lens of freedom within a framework and, through that same lens, what improvements can be made [See Figure 9]. Getting this framework right will help WeTransfer give the desired guidance to their employees.

### Purpose

The purpose - to enable creativity - is understood and supported by most employees, although they might use different words to express that purpose, like 'supporting creatives'. There is no doubt about the fact that creativity is at the heart of WeTransfer. Thus, I believe this purpose is a strong base for WeTransfer's framework.

### Priorities

WeTransfer expresses two sets of priorities: the company values and the brand values. The company values should serve as an internal compass, while the brand values are leading to how the brand shows up externally. In principle, it should not be an issue to employ an internal and an external set of values, as long as the two are complementary - like two sides of the same coin. According to scholars such as Iyer et al. (2018) and Urde et al. (2013), there is a need for a set of core values that is applied both internally (through company values) and externally (through brand values). That way, one can build a brand-oriented company, for which the brand identity serves as a guiding light. However, at WeTransfer there is no set of core values defined and employees do not fully resonate with existing values. From the research, it is observed that the company values feel outdated to most people. The brand values are even unknown by the majority of employees I spoke to and

merely put to use by people in marketing- or branding-related functions. Hence, there is a lack of connection between articulated internal and external values.

The importance of rethinking these values is recognised by multiple employees with whom I spoke, including the Chief Human Resources Officer and the Chief Executive Officer (G. Willoughby & G. Burbidge, personal communication, April 28, 2022). However, a complete design of WeTransfer's core values would take up more time and resources than this project affords. The conducted research points out that beneath the surface, employees are led and inspired by a common set of values but these are just not yet concisely written down. For feasibility reasons, an educated assumption is thus made on what these priorities are. Looking back at the interview outcomes, it seems that (three of the four) brand values reflect employees' understanding of and identification with the brand better than the company values. 'Freedom', 'creativity' and 'humanity' are three broad themes that explain WeTransfer's brand - both its internal and its external aspects - reasonably well [See [Appendix R: Assumption core values](#)], as confirmed with the CHRO and CEO too (G. Willoughby & G. Burbidge, personal communication, April 28, 2022). I will thus consider these as the core values for the course of this project, to be able to design the principles



in line with the priorities. In *Chapter 12: Wrapping up the project*, I will further elaborate on my suggestions regarding the redesign of the values.

### Principles

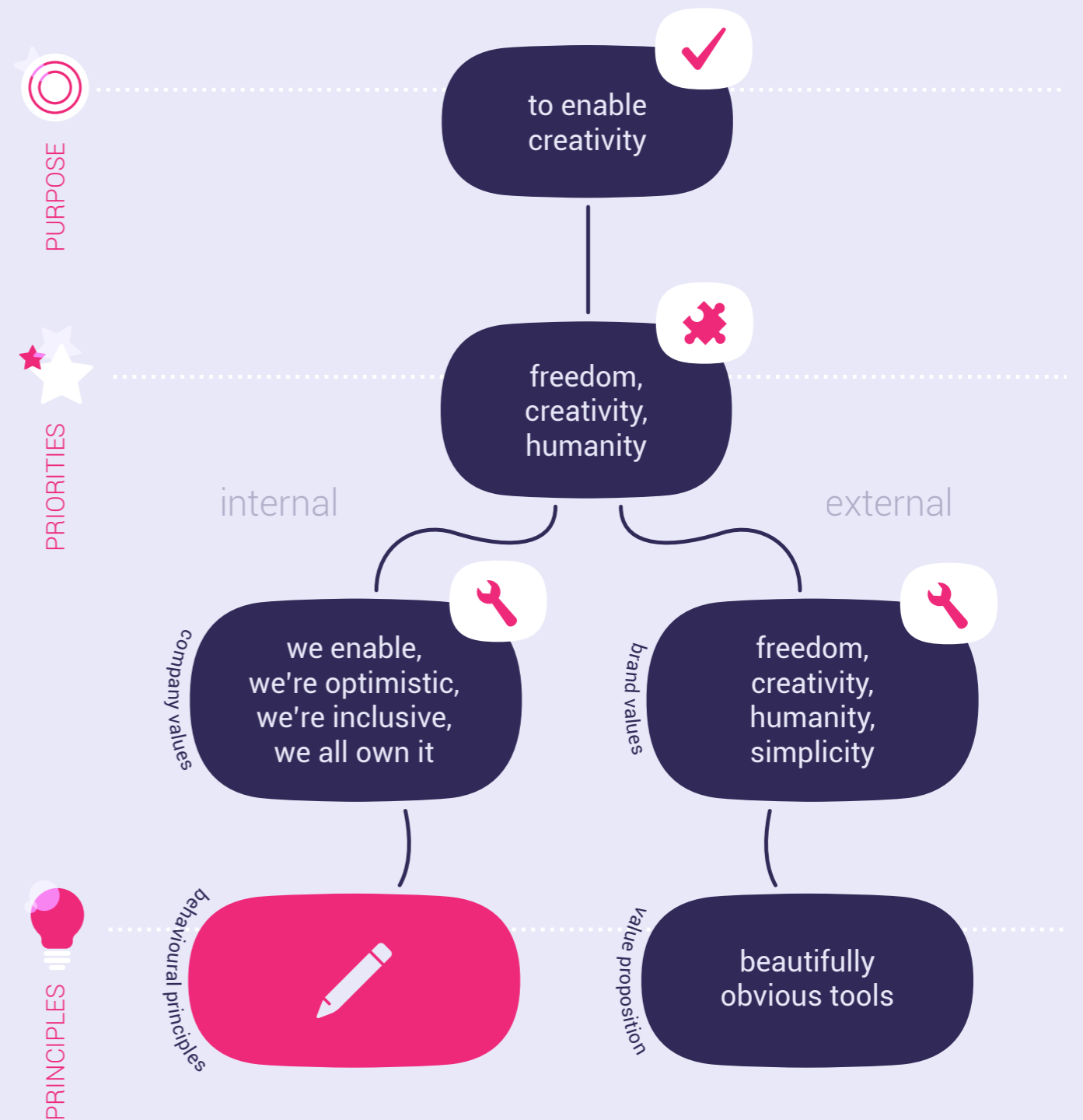
The principles embody the challenge earlier posed: they are a concretisation of the purpose and values. Since WeTransfer employs both an internal and external set of values, the principles could also be understood both internally and externally. The external version of the principles concerns the manifestation of the values in outward communication, e.g. how the brand values are brought to life for customers: the value proposition. The internal version of the principles are the manifestation of values within the company, e.g. how the company values are brought to life for and by employees. Such a set of clear and concrete behavioural principles can help employees understand the values clearly and solve the revealed fragmented internal understanding of brand values at WeTransfer.

Therefore, the internal principles will be what the final design of this project revolves around. These principles are meant to offer employees guidance in their daily behaviour, to enable them to put the brand purpose and priorities into practice. Especially since the goal is to keep all employees on the same page during rapid company growth, the concretisation of the brand is key to creating common understanding and motivation.

Thus, the first step in approaching the design goal is:

**Make it clear.**  
Internally concretising the WeTransfer brand, by designing a set of principles

FIGURE 9. FREEDOM WITHIN A FRAMEWORK APPLIED TO WETRANSFER



# A learning system

for internal branding

Designing a set of principles could in itself potentially be a great solution to the growth challenge WeTransfer currently faces - by concretising the quite abstract brand purpose and values into behaviour. However, it would be far more valuable for the company to learn how to deal with similar issues in the future by itself. We are speaking of a rapidly expanding company in the ever-changing tech industry, that would thus benefit from an increased change capacity ("the ability of an organisation to change not just once, but as a normal response to changes in its environment") (Heckmann, Steger, & Dowling, 2016). From a designer's perspective, it would also make sense to take a capacity-building approach, seeking to encourage WeTransfer to become capable of tackling future challenges, rather than solving the problem through a one-off design project (Calabretta, Gemser, & Karpen, 2018). Regarding freedom within a framework, and the associated principles, capacity-building means equipping WeTransfer with the tools to keep reflecting and improving on the internal manifestation of the brand (i.e. the principles). To help the company acquaint these capacities, a social learning system should be built around WeTransfer's internal brand. Within such a learning system, employees have the possibility to actively engage with the topic, imagine what exactly the internal brand means (to them) and eventually align perspectives and actions (Wenger, 2000). For organisations, positioning themselves as a social

learning system helps deal with complexity and increases internal participation (Wenger, 2000). In practice, a learning system could encompass many activities: organising events, holding cross-disciplinary sessions, brokering between different parts of the community and supporting interaction through boundary objects, which are living (continuously changing) artefacts that are meant to facilitate collaboration in complex contexts (Wenger, 2000; Johnson, Ballie, Thorup, & Brooks, 2017; Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018).

So, the second step in approaching the design goal is:

## Make it live.

Initiating and facilitating an ongoing conversation about the principles, by building a social learning system around the internal brand

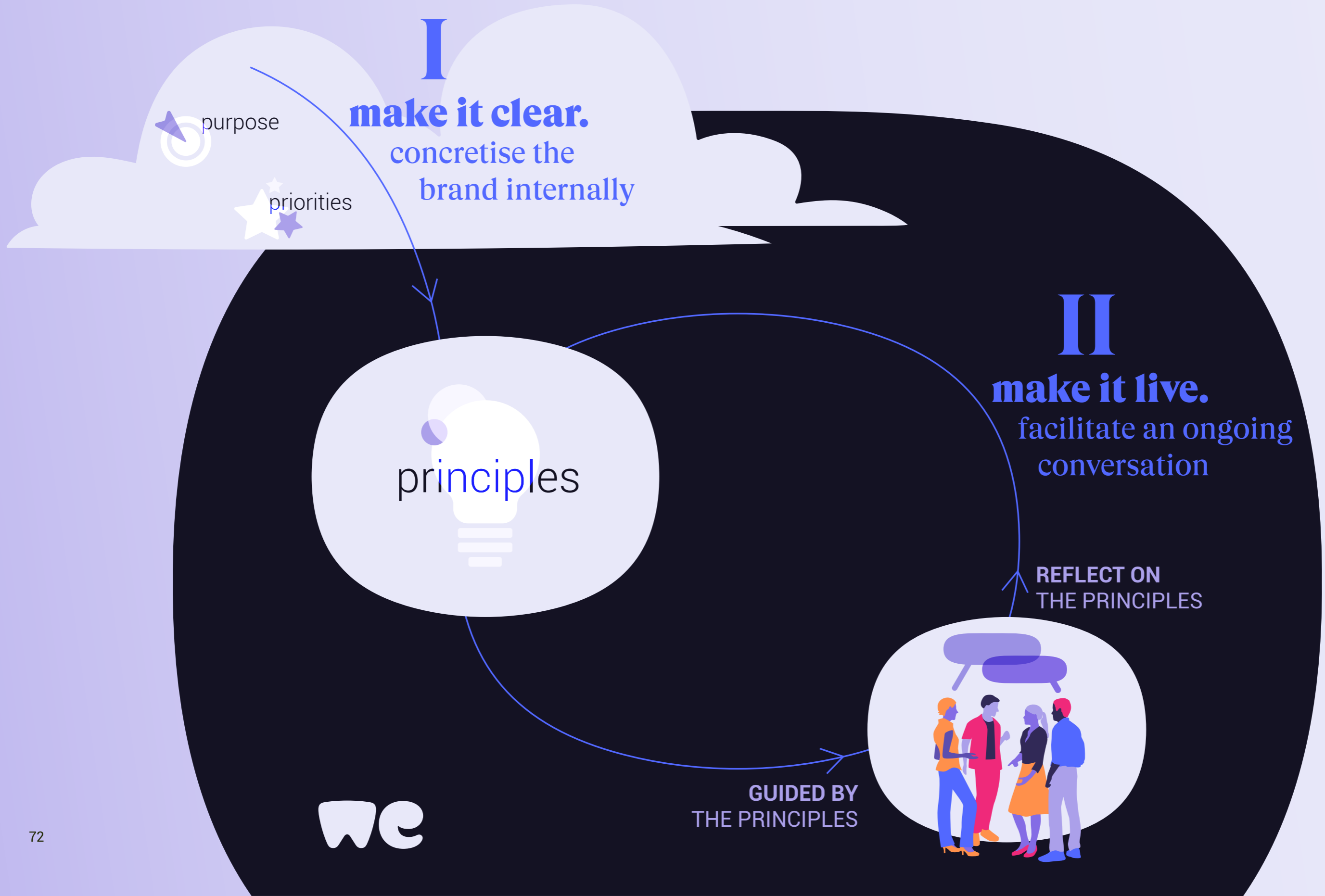
# The strategy

The two steps in the approach combined form a strategy. This strategy describes how I plan to tackle the design challenge. The principles are the result of internal concretisation of the brand and form the starting point of a system of discussion and learning. A continuous feedback loop of the principles is maintained by employees. On the one hand, they are guided by these principles to contribute to the brand and on the other hand, they constantly reflect on the principles. The strategy is the base for further ideation and design.

*The next page closes this part with an overview of the strategy.*

## TAKEAWAYS PART IV. STRATEGY

- This project will focus on balancing guidance and freedom at WeTransfer. More specifically, the design goal is to **guide employees in contributing to brand values and purpose in their day-to-day work, while retaining freedom and autonomy**
- A two-step strategy is proposed to address the design goal:
  - To guide employees in contributing to the brand in their day-to-day work (as stated in the design goal), the brand needs to be **concretised internally** in a set of **principles**.
  - To ensure an impact that is sustainable in the long term, an **ongoing conversation** should be evoked with a **learning system**.



# V. Design

[Background](#)[Research](#)[Strategy](#)[Design](#)[Implementation](#)

## A proposal for internal brand manifestation: make it clear and make it live.

This part describes a solution created to illustrate the strategy set out in the previous part. The design consists of two components, playing into the two steps of the strategy. The WeTransfer manifesto is designed to make the brand internally clear. The Living the brand program is designed to put the manifesto into action and make it internally live. This part will first briefly present the idea and the design requirements. After that, the development and validation of respectively the manifesto and the program are described.

### Chapters in this part

[10. Idea: WeTransfer manifesto and Living the brand program](#)[11. Design requirements](#)[12. Developing the WeTransfer manifesto](#)[13. Developing the Living the brand program](#)

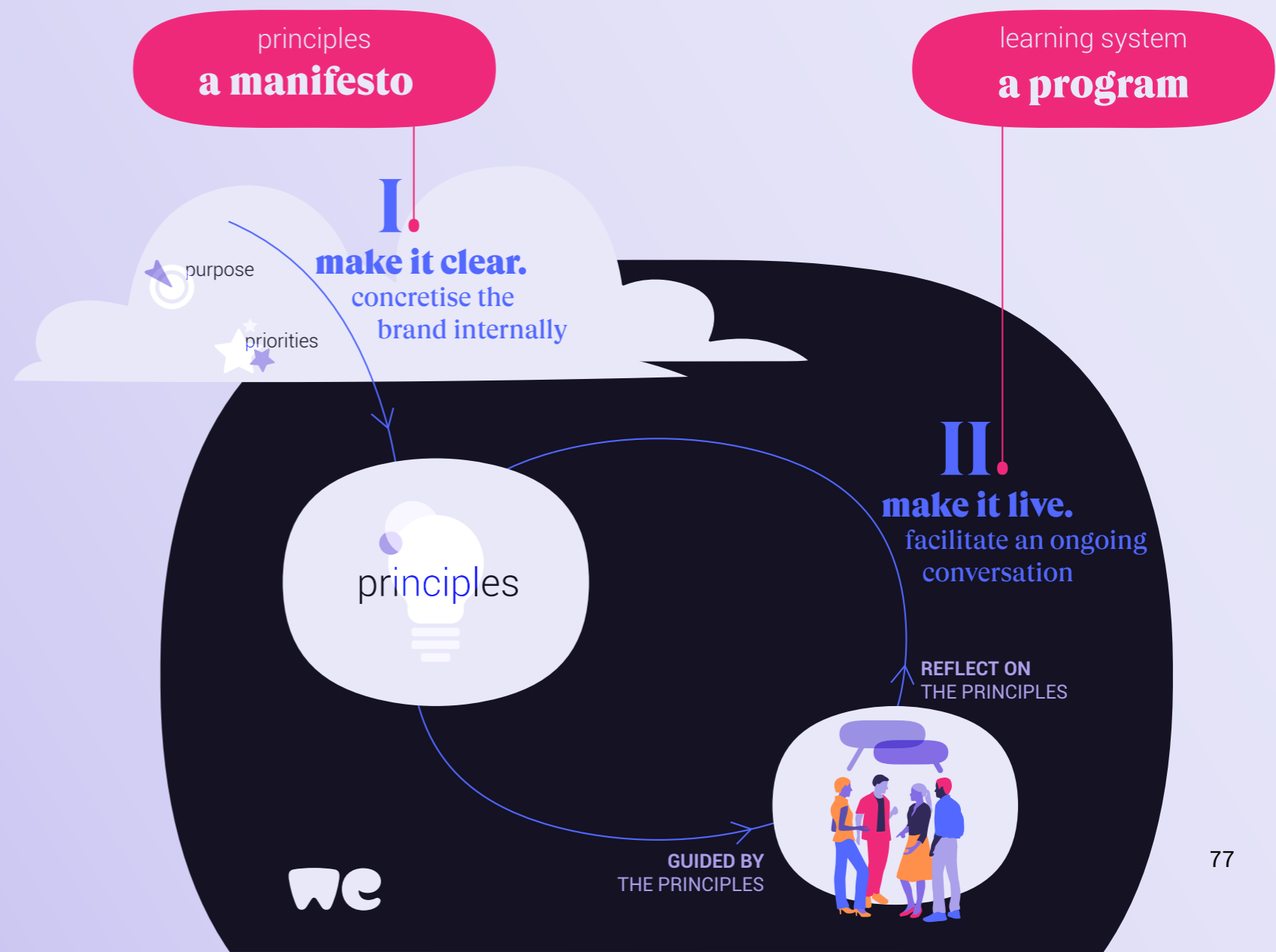


# 10 Idea: WeTransfer manifesto and Living the brand program

## An idea to illustrate the strategy

The final design strategy encompasses two elements. To deliver on every part of it, I developed the idea of a twofold solution: A WeTransfer manifesto communicates the principles (the concretisation of the brand values) to the employees. This manifesto is brought to life and kept up-to-date through a Living the brand program, designed to actuate employees to internalise the brand. Together, these elements form a practical manifestation of the proposed strategy [See Figure 10].

FIGURE 10. IDEAS TO ILLUSTRATE THE TWO-STEP STRATEGY



**Make it clear.** Internally concretising the WeTransfer brand, by designing a set of principles

# WeTransfer manifesto

The principles, functioning as guidance to align day-to-day behaviour with the brand values and purpose, will take the shape of a manifesto. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2022, May 10), a manifesto is defined as a written statement of beliefs, aims and policies. Manifestos are put to use in the field of branding as a tool to translate the intangible brand assets into articulated guidelines (Tselenti, 2019). Specifically for corporate (or internal) brand management, manifestos have the potential to align perceptions and actions (Haris & Chernatony, 2001). Manifestos have an impact on two levels (Tselenti, 2019). The first level is internal brand management; a manifesto projects the corporate brand on behaviour in the workforce. The second level is external brand management; a manifesto can function as a marketing tool to carry out the company's commitment to its values.

## WeTransfer & manifestos

In this case, the manifesto will specifically list the behavioural principles of WeTransfer. WeTransfer is particularly familiar with and attached to manifestos, because of the 'A Manifesto By...' series that was published on WePresent, the company's arts and editorial digital platform [See Figure 11] (WePresent, n.d.). In several articles, artists create their personal manifesto, creatively presenting ten rules they live by. There are multiple reasons why I choose to design a manifesto in this context.

- The concept of a manifesto is well-known to employees, and so it will be relatively easy to adopt
- It is a short, comprehensive and attractive way to bring across the internal concretisation of the brand
- A manifesto is actionable and can therefore be guiding in several situations
- The format demands simplicity, which will increase the memorability of the principles

## manifesto

**noun** [C]  
plural manifestos or manifestoes

a written statement of the beliefs, aims, and policies of an organization, especially a political party.

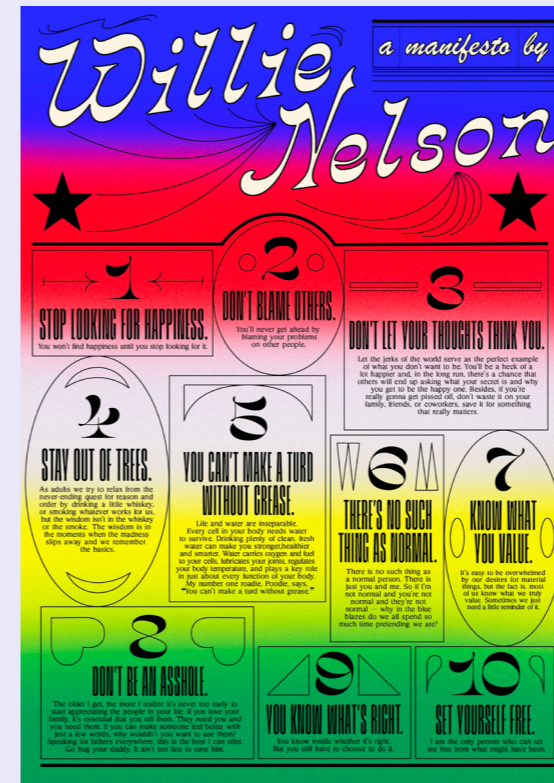


FIGURE 11. AN IMPRESSION OF THE 'A MANIFESTO BY...' SERIES FROM WEPRESENT



**Make it live.** Initiating and facilitating an ongoing conversation about the principles, by building a social learning system around the internal brand

# Living the brand program

To keep the conversation about the internal brand flowing, I will design a program that helps employees live the brand (the Living the brand program). The manifesto is at the centre of this program and forms the subject of discussion.

## Brand ambassadors

The program is facilitated by a selection of employees (called brand ambassadors), appointed to go on the mission to internalise the brand. The use of brand ambassadors offers the possibility to inject the brand value and purpose into daily behaviour in a non-hierarchical way (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018). Also, it gives a team of people the ownership, or at least responsibility, over this program, which will help keep the company actively involved with the topic of internal branding. Brand ambassadors can participate in a range of activities, with three main objectives:

### Spread the word

Especially in the beginning phase of the program, brand ambassadors will have to spread the word about the internal brand and the manifesto amongst colleagues. They will take the role of internal brand motivators, in order to raise awareness and engagement (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018).

### Finger on the pulse

As the goal is to facilitate a discussion about the principles, brand ambassadors should keep track of the current status of the internal brand: do people understand the principles? Do they support them, and does their behaviour reflect the brand? Because of the inside perspective, brand ambassadors are in the perfect position to execute this task (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018).

### Iterate to stay up-to-date

A capacity-building approach entails enabling continuous iteration. Because brand ambassadors will grow expertise about the brand and its internal manifestation, they should facilitate the discussion that leads to possible iterations. Also, brand ambassadors could function as a switch between management and employees throughout the full breadth of the company (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018).

## Boundary object: a journal

A personal journal for all employees can function as a boundary object in the Living the brand program [See [Appendix S: Ideation boundary object](#) for an impression of the ideation preceding this idea]. With the program, I envision WeTransfer's employees as a learning community, which collaboratively builds knowledge of and affinity for the internal manifestation of the brand (Fominykh, Prasolova-Førland, Divitini, & Petersen, 2016). A boundary object can accelerate that collaboration, by enabling the knowledge and changes around the internal brand, that currently exists mostly beneath the surface, to become explicit - in this manner creating opportunities for discussion and alignment within a company of increasing scale (Johnson et al., 2017). Also, such an artifact can help learners and collaborators from different backgrounds engage with one another (Fominykh et al., 2016).

This journal, that every employee will receive, contains the principles of the manifesto, but also space for creative in-depth assignments, ideas and reflection. This way, employees are encouraged to, on the one hand, build up knowledge about the manifesto and, on the other hand, generate feedback on how that manifesto can be improved. The format of a journal seems suitable for this context for multiple reasons:

- A journal plays into WeTransfer's creative nature and the sentiment of 'together we make'
- The manifesto is this way presented as something unfinished and flexible, thus inspiring employees to put their knowledge to work to adapt the manifesto (Borgen, 2021)
- Every single employee is involved in the internal manifestation of the brand
- A journal helps translate the abstract subject of internal branding into explicit and tangible information

# 11 Design requirements

Based on insights from the collected theory and field research, the design requirements are drawn up. This is done for both the manifesto and the program (including the journal that will be the boundary object). The requirements should be followed when conceptualising the design, to address the design goal in the best possible way.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR DESIGNING THE

### WeTransfer manifesto

The manifesto is meant to internally concretise the brand according to the theory of freedom within a framework; thus, without losing freedom and autonomy. The following design requirements should be taken into consideration to achieve that aim.

- The manifesto principles must be **concrete enough** to provide guidance, but broad enough to be applicable to multiple situations (Gulati, 2018)
- The manifesto principles must offer **context, not control** (Netflix Jobs, n.d.)
- The manifesto principles may not be generic, but must **set WeTransfer apart** from other companies (Lencioni, 2002)
- The manifesto principles must be **about active behaviour**, not about perks that are given to employees (e.g. 'dare to speak up', not 'get enough freedom to speak up')
- The manifesto principles must describe behaviour that can be **applied by every single individual** (not only on the organisational level)
- The manifesto must be a **list of** (around 10) **guidelines**
- The manifesto that will be designed is a first - not a final - version and forms the starting point for a **living document**, meant to be iterated on, as argued in *Chapter 9: Two-step strategy*

## REQUIREMENTS FOR DESIGNING THE

### Living the brand program

The program functions as the backbone for the conversation that is initiated and facilitated around the internal brand. It sets out the infrastructure of the learning system, in order to keep the discussion alive in the long term. For the program to have the envisioned effect, the following design requirements should be followed.

- To make the topic live within the entire organisation, the program should facilitate **interaction on multiple levels** (individual, team, company-wide) (Wenger, 2000; as explained in the section '*Bring the brand to life*' in *Chapter 4: Internal branding in theory*)
- The program should be **engaging, but not exhausting**, for everyone involved
- The program should **motivate brand ambassadors** to put in effort (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018)
- The program should **feel non-hierarchical, but respect top-down aspects** (G. Willoughby & G. Burbidge, personal communication, April 28, 2022)
- The program should **fit in** with existing platforms, way of working and activities (G. Willoughby & G. Burbidge, personal communication, April 28, 2022)

#### Journal

The journal is meant to facilitate education and reflection on the manifesto. It forms a boundary between the abstract subject of internal branding and the tangible knowledge of the individual employee, thus making the inexplicit explicit. To be able to deliver on this objective, the journal should meet the following design requirements.

- To fit into WeTransfer's current culture and sentiment, the journal should **stimulate creativity** (see the section '*The client: WeTransfer*' in *Chapter 1: Context of the project*)
- The journal should be **inviting to interact with** (Johnson et al., 2017)
- To make the most out of the input of individuals, the journal should be **personal**
- The journal should be as **simple and straightforward** as possible in its communication style (as WeTransfer wants things to be 'beautifully obvious', see the section '*The client: WeTransfer*' in *Chapter 1: Context of the project*)



# 12 Developing the WeTransfer manifesto

## Method

### Manifesto development

To create the manifesto, a method was adopted that combines research findings with co-creation.

#### 1 Select research findings

Firstly, the relevant data that gives insight specifically into brand-related behaviour, is deducted from interviews and from an internally conducted survey (by the HR department) (WeTransfer, 2022b) [See *Appendix T: Input data creative session*]. By taking these insights along and using them as a starting point for the creative session, a richer result will eventually be achieved. It also adds a quantitative element to the argumentation of the manifesto.

#### 2 Creative session

Secondly, a creative session was held to start building the manifesto. The session was created using the data collected in the previous step. The reason why a creative session is suitable in this stage is that it brings the opportunity to involve employees and thus create a sense of ownership over the result. Also, it is useful to exploit their experience and to hear multiple perspectives from people with (in)direct involvement with the solution being developed (Vianna, Vianna, Adler, Lucena, & Russo, 2011, p. 105). Nine employees, selected on their knowledge and vision of WeTransfer's brand and culture, joined the 2-hour online session. Later in this chapter, the details and outcomes of this creative session are discussed.

CREATIVE SESSION  
P. 86

#### 3 Integration

Thirdly, the collected data from steps one and two are integrated into a draft version of the manifesto.

DRAFT VERSION  
P. 88

#### 4 Validation

The proposed design solution is one that should eventually be carried by all employees. The manifesto is an expression of the behaviour that everybody collectively commits to. For this reason, it is valuable to hear as many voices as possible in order to validate the design components. An additional objective of this validation is to get employees already involved with the topic and plant seeds to reflect on how brand values are reflected in their behaviour.

A session was held to validate the draft version of the manifesto and gather input to finetune the manifesto. The input from this session was used to decide which principles should be in the final version of the manifesto and to tweak the principles where necessary. 30 employees attended the walk-in session and shared their feedback on the manifesto. The details of the validation session and its outcomes can be found in the section '*Walk-in session*'.

WALK-IN SESSION  
P. 90

After validation, a final version of the manifesto was created.

FINAL VERSION  
P. 96

# Creative session

25 APRIL, 2 HOURS

## to lay the foundation of the manifesto

The creative session is meant to lay the foundation of the manifesto. In other words, the goal is not to collaboratively write the manifesto principles word by word, but rather to explore what kind of behaviour it is that should be in there. The session is designed to find out how a WeTransfer employee should act according to the participants. Therefore, the exercises are built around 'desired behaviours', which are formulated and later evaluated by participants. To move away from generic understandings, the nuances and extremes of the behaviour are explored. In *Appendix U: Creative session*, a detailed overview of the exercises is presented.

**Aim** To lay the foundation for the contents of the manifesto, by defining 'desired behaviours'

**Sampling** 9 participants with strong knowledge and vision of the WeTransfer brand and culture

### Activities

#### Introduction

##### 1 WeTransfer-y

The session was kicked off by a cold start exercise. Participants were asked to think of a moment where a coworker did something typically 'WeTransfer-y'. Then, they indicated why this moment was so characteristic for WeTransfer. Through this exercise, sources of inspiration are uncovered and participants are introduced to the topic without bias.

#### Discussion

##### 2 Fridge magnets

In 'fridge magnets', participants created sentences that describe desired behaviours. To give them a place to start and to incorporate earlier research findings, a set of building blocks was given. Participants were asked to shuffle these building blocks, possibly add some and finally form three sentences (desired behaviours).

#### Discussion (2 - all format)

##### Desired behaviours

All desired behaviours (27 in total) were gathered on the Miro board. The participants were now given a couple of minutes to read through the sentences and place some icons next to the ones they find either interesting, recognisable or inspiring. This helps them choose which desired behaviours to continue with in the next exercise.

##### 3 Deep dive

In pairs, the participants picked two desired behaviours from the list. For these behaviours, they discussed five questions that are meant to flesh out and nuance the behaviours. These questions explore the extreme version of the behaviour, the exception to the behaviour, the sacrifice that has to be made, the aim of the behaviour and the rebellion the company shows through this behaviour.

#### Closing

### Outcomes

#### General impression

Based on hearing feedback from the participants and observing how the exercises went, I developed the general impression that it was valuable for participants to engage in the activities. Taking the time to thoroughly think about the kind of behaviour that is desirable at WeTransfer allowed them to reflect on current practices and clarify the company's abstract values. Also, session participants expressed that they found it especially interesting to think about the boundaries, extremes and sacrifices of behaviour. That helped move away from the generic and be specific about what the desired behaviour really means, what it does not mean and what it takes to commit to it. For example, acting in the best interest of users is a fine, agreeable desired behaviour. However, it only gets interesting when one starts thinking about aspects like the downside - e.g. giving up part of the creative freedom - and the exception to this behaviour - eg. when users demand WeTransfer operates in contradiction with its values.

“There are contradictions that make us the company that we are”

#### Inspiring and desired behaviour

The session was designed to uncover which kinds of behaviour employees find inspiring and desirable. To interpret the outcome, a distinction between those two can be made. Behaviour that participants found inspiring, mostly expressed in the 'WeTransfer-y' exercise, often tended to the more extreme and bold side. However, when asked about desired behaviour, participants gave more rational and conforming responses. The behaviour that is eventually included in the manifesto should be both desirable and inspiring. On the right, the most mentioned or most strongly agreed on kinds of behaviour are summarised.

“Sometimes these values can feel very broad and open and not actionable. It would help me at least if the values were more actionable and clear”

“It's not very often that you get to define what it is that something isn't”

#### Inspiring behaviour

- Teamwork; supporting each other
- Daring to speak up
- Dedication; making an effort

#### Desired behaviour

- Embracing open communication
- Encouraging teamwork
- Putting users first

# Draft version

To craft the manifesto concept, earlier insights from the interviews and the employee engagement survey were combined with what was created during the session. The desired behaviours that received the most 'votes', or agreement, from participants are worth taking along. These were checked on fit with the design requirements.

A page on Notion shows a similar concretisation of the company values (WeTransfer Notion, personal communication, 29 April, 2022). Research findings show that the company values do currently not strike a chord within the company and the concretisation shown in Notion most certainly is not explicitly known by most employees. However, these pieces of text can contain interesting elements, and therefore they are combined with interview and session outcomes and used as input where overlap exists. *Appendix V: From data to draft manifesto* shows the process of going from research data to manifesto principles.

A total of 11 principles were formulated for this draft version of the manifesto. Based on validation results, the number of principles will eventually be brought down.

## A manifestation of the core values

The section '*Freedom within a framework - applied to WeTransfer*' in *Chapter 9: Two-step strategy* elaborated on an educated assumption concerning the priorities of WeTransfer. Freedom, creativity and humanity were assumed to capture the essence of the company's core values. Also, the insight was shared that employees are under-surface all driven by the same values, which are just not explicitly communicated yet. According to that reasoning, the bottom-up created

principles should naturally follow the same lines as the priorities distilled from research. It is now interesting to compare the assumed priorities and the co-created principles side by side and evaluate alignment. Moreover, the principles can provide deepening and clarification of the priorities, showing what they mean for concrete behaviour. Thus, all three assumed priorities are on the right interpreted by means of the formulated manifesto principles.

**1 We are critical thinkers, because we don't take anything at face value**

**2 We dare to speak our minds and encourage others to do the same**

**3 We foster an environment of togetherness and teamwork**

**4 We support others to do their best work and we always empathise**

**5 With everything we do, we put in the effort to do it well**

**6 We act in our users' best interest, but we don't blindly follow them**

**7 We are not afraid to upset bigots**

**8 We just go for it**

**9 We thrive by people's positive energy**

**10 We pay attention to including and hearing everyone**

**11 We do things our own way**

### Freedom

To WeTransfer, freedom means letting nobody stop you. If there is something they do or do not like, they will make that clear. WeTransfer thinks in possibilities rather than in obstacles. People are not afraid to take the shot. As often quoted by employees: 'we rather ask for forgiveness than for permission'.

- We are critical thinkers, because we don't take anything at face value
- We dare to speak our minds and encourage others to do the same
- We are not afraid to upset bigots
- We just go for it
- We do things our own way

### Creativity

Creativity reflects WeTransfer's whimsy, quirkiness and optimism. Following the obvious road is not in their DNA, since they will always look for ways to do it better or more creatively. The interest of the user is always centric, but WeTransfer employees are their own biggest critics. Everything they create must meet the high standard; that is what drives them to make things beautiful and simple.

- With everything we do, we put in the effort to do it well
- We act in our users' best interest, but we don't blindly follow them
- We thrive by people's positive energy
- We do things our own way

### Humanity

Putting people first is a common trait of WeTransfer employees. This is seen in how they surround themselves with the right people and how they consequently have those people's backs at all times. The sense of humanity is grounded in the belief that together, they are worth more than alone.

- We foster an environment of togetherness and teamwork
- We support others to do their best work and we always empathise
- We act in our users' best interest, but we don't blindly follow them
- We pay attention to including and hearing everyone

# Walk-in session

17 MAY, 1.5 HOURS

## to validate the manifesto and the journal\*

At the WeTransfer offsite, a two-day event where all employees gather, one space was dedicated to this session for 90 minutes. A walk-in format was applied, in which people could come into the room at any time and walk by the activities independently. The session was designed to match the atmosphere of the offsite event in its informality and entertaining value. Participants walked past a wall where posters formed the base for four subsequent activities.

**Aim** The session is organised with two main goals.

1. The first aim of this session was to gather input to finalise the manifesto. There are two envisioned outcomes:
  - Find out which principles are preferred and which ones are criticised, to be able to decide which principles will eventually be in the final version.
  - Gather substantive feedback on the principles, to be able to finetune the nuances and the wording of the manifesto.
2. Secondly, the opportunity was seized to gather feedback on the concept of the journal as a boundary object.

**Sampling** An opportunistic sampling strategy allowed every employee that walked in to participate (Patton, 2014).

### Activities 1 Diabolical dilemmas

As an implicit validation of the manifesto principles, a series of dilemmas was proposed to the participants. Every dilemma represents a manifesto principle, translated into a scenario an employee could encounter on a day at work. This activity is a variation on scenario play, as a simulation of a situation is created, playing to the participant's imagination (Vianna et al., 2011, p. 133). For every dilemma, people placed a post-it on a scale with two extremes on both sides. The question asked was: what would a WeTransferian do? The outcomes uncover what kind of behaviour WeTransfer employees

tend to show and can thus be used to validate the manifesto principles. In order to make sure the dilemmas do not contain socially desired answers, a pilot was conducted in advance amongst three participants, each working in a different type of organisation. The pilot showed how the mean of most answers layed close to the middle of the scale, adding confidence to the fact that no socially desired or 'obvious' responses are evoked - except for one dilemma, which was consequently adapted to a less extreme version [See [Appendix W: Dilemmas pilot](#) for the pilot outcomes].

*\* As part of this session, an MVP test for the journal was also executed. On [page 116](#), the take-aways of this test are shared.*

### 2 It's the remix

Secondly, the manifesto was evaluated in an explicit way. A draft of the manifesto was handed to every participant. The manifesto principles were cut loose on one end, so that they could easily be torn off. Participants were asked to remove their five least favourite principles, draw a heart on their favourite one and add a principle themselves. With this exercise, input is gathered as to which principles should and should not be in the final manifesto and if any topics are still missing.

### 3 A Manifesto By...

One of the objectives of this walk-in session was to create a sense of ownership among employees. After they completed the first two exercises, they come by a big poster saying 'put your name here as proof that you contributed to the WT Manifesto'. Besides the symbolic value, this will also help have a gross idea of who joined the session.

Scroll through to [Appendix X: Walk-in session](#) to see the details and contents of the session.

### 4 What if?

Lastly, a quick exercise is presented as a first validation of the journal (the boundary object). The concept is described and presented on a poster, together with a mock-up visualisation. Participants are simply asked to put their thoughts on the poster. They are guided by some questions that give them an idea of how to evaluate the concept (e.g.: would this help you get more acquainted with the brand? And: would you write in it, daily, weekly, or not at all?).



Transferian is  
 At some point,  
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 mfortable.



**It's the remix.**

Before you is a draft of the WeTransfer manifesto (the rules we work by). It's a draft, so help improve it now. S'il vous plait.

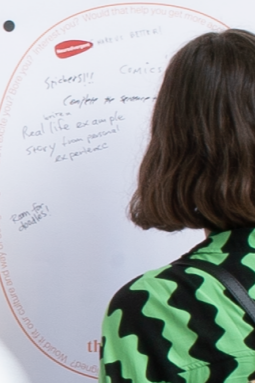
1. Take a manifesto draft
2. Tear off the 5 principles you'd least like to be in there
3. Add 1 principle
4. Draw a <3 on your favourite principle

**if...**

ould get a  
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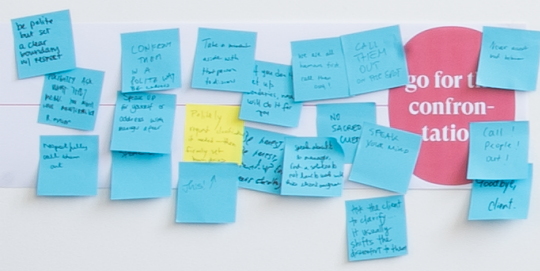
for reflection,  
 drawings,  
 on.

get to know our  
 and make it evolve



**Manifesto**

ere (somewhere) as proof that  
 WT manifesto.





# Walk-in session

## Outcomes

### Rating of the principles

One of the main aims of the session was to find out which principles were felt most by the participants and which ones were not. By combining the insights of the Diabolical Dilemmas exercise with the insights of It's the remix, a rating was made of the principles, from favourite to least favourite. Find all insights and numbers in [Appendix X: Walk-in session outcomes](#).

### Favourite

- We dare to speak our minds and encourage others to do the same
- We pay attention to including and hearing everyone
- We are not afraid to upset bigots
- We are critical thinkers because we don't take anything at face value

### Doubtful

- We thrive on people's positive energy
- We foster an environment of togetherness and teamwork
- We support others to do their best work and we always empathise
- We do things our own way

### Least favourite

- With everything we do, we put in the effort to do it well
- We act in our users' best interest, but we don't blindly follow them
- We just go for it

### General impression

Firstly, we see that there seems to be an overlap in some of the principles. For example, 'we are critical thinkers', 'we are not afraid to upset bigots' and 'we dare to speak our minds' all seem to fall into the same category of reasoning. When answering the corresponding dilemmas, participants explained they found it important to be open about what you think, but also to stay critical by listening to new perspectives. Then, there were also principles that seem to need rephrasing. For example, 'we just go for it' was ranked as one of the least favourite. But in the corresponding dilemma, participants were very like-minded and supported the principle.

Then, when reading the qualitative feedback retrieved in this session, it appears that two seemingly contradictory streams of behaviour are valued. On the one hand, people at WeTransfer want to be daring, fearless and courageous. On the other hand, they also think it is important to be caring, thoughtful and attentive. The combination and integration of these two types of behaviour is what differentiates WeTransfer. This duality should be taken along in the manifesto because it is characteristic of the desired employee behaviour.

### Key iterations

Based on the validation session, the manifesto is finetuned.

- Emphasise the duality of daring and caring, by dividing the principles up into two groups: 'we dare to...' and 'we care to...'
- Keep 'speak our minds', 'do things our way' and 'support others to do their best work'
- Rephrase 'just go for it' into 'take on a challenge'
- Rephrase 'critical thinkers' into 'stay curious to keep learning'
- Rephrase 'pay attention to including and hearing everyone' into 'listen to every voice'





# WeTransfer manifesto

By combining insights of both sessions and earlier research, a final WeTransfer manifesto is composed. Note that this manifesto might be 'final' for this project, but should be understood as the starting point for the Living the brand program and is open for iterations. Honouring the duality of daring and caring behaviour, the manifesto consists of two parts. For every principle, a short elaboration is given.

## We dare to...

### Speak our minds

That means we stand for what we believe in and we are not afraid to express that loud and clear. Actually, we want people around us to show the same level of authenticity and honesty.

### Take on a (scary) challenge

That means we jump on it, take the shot, and seize the opportunity. We like to trust our gut. And if something doesn't work out, that is okay. Fail fast, learn faster.

### Stay curious and open to learn

That means we dare to question ourselves when needed. Because there might be a better way and we are always eager to learn more. Our critical and curious eye is one of our greatest assets.

## We care to...

### Listen to every voice

That means that the best idea wins, no matter who it comes from. Every voice has the right to be heard. Moreover, we understand that hearing multiple perspectives is always better.

### Support others to be their best

That means that we do not only empower ourselves, but also others. We always think of the human behind a story and seek to truly understand that person, so we can do what's best for them.

### Put in the effort to do things well

That means that with everything we create, we have a high standard. Make it good, make it bold, make it beautiful, but most of all: make it with effort and with love.



# 13 Developing the Living the brand program

## Method

### Program development

#### 1 Program design

The program is designed with input from literature, both on internal branding and on learning systems. This information is taken along when mapping the outlines of the program: the roles, the activities and the timelines. As shared before, the program evolves around the manifesto and helps employees to be guided by and reflect on the principles. With the design of all components, the three objectives of the program are kept in mind: spread the word, keep a finger on the pulse and iterate to stay up-to-date. Also, the design requirements listed in *Chapter 11: Design requirements* are used as guidelines.

#### 2 Journal design & validation

The journal is an essential component of the program, functioning as an artifact. To design this journal, literature on boundary objects is creatively put to practice. Also, the phases of internal branding as described in *Chapter 5: Stages of internal branding* form the theoretical base for the contents of the journal. To illustrate what the journal would look and feel like, a section (for one of the manifesto principles) is created.

Because the journal is a component of the program that has high interactive value with the user (the employee), a quick validation was conducted with employees to find out what their impressions of the idea were. This was done with a minimum viable product (MVP), which is a fast way to create a valuable feedback loop with minimum effort (Ries, 2011, p. 93). As Ries also writes, simplicity is key in designing an MVP (2011, p. 95). The MVP had the shape of a poster presenting a mock-up of the journal. At the walk-in session (discussed in the previous chapter), 10 employees gave their first thoughts and impressions to the concept. These insights are taken along in the design of the journal as additional design requirements [See *Appendix X: Walk-in session*].

### 3 Program validation

In the previous chapter, it is described how the manifesto is designed and validated in cooperation with employees (the final 'users'), to create an accurate and desirable end result. However, for the Living the brand program, not only the desirability should be validated, but also the viability and feasibility. To that end, it is most valuable to consult experts (Calabretta et al., 2018). Experts are best suited to determine to which extent the resources and capabilities are present (feasibility), to what extent the design meets the envisioned business objectives (viability) and to what extent the design is desired for both the company and individual employees (desirability) [See Appendix cD: *Expert validation* for the exact questions asked and answers given]. Three experts were interviewed for validation:

- Kees de Kruijf (Business Coach and Trainer at SpaarneCoaching; has experience with the facilitation of business sessions and workshops): to get an objective view on the structure of the program and the content of the sessions
- Ronen Mendelovitz (Learning & Development Manager at WeTransfer; has experience with setting up programs at WeTransfer): to get an insider view on the program set-up and the fit with WeTransfer and its employees
- Damian Bradfield (Chief Creative Officer and Co-Founder of WeTransfer; has experience with WeTransfer's culture, brand and leadership): to get an insider view on how the program plays into the bigger picture and strategy of WeTransfer

A range of insights was retrieved from the expert interviews. These insights are processed in three ways:

- Part of the suggestions for improvement are already **implemented in the design**. These considerations will be described in the sections that follow, marked with a •.
- Part of the suggestions for improvement call for **further research and design** and are discussed in *Chapter 16: Discussion*.
- An **overall impression of the viability, feasibility and desirability** of the program is discussed in the section '*Validation*' at the end of this chapter.

# Learning journey

The Living the brand program should bring the WeTransfer manifesto to life. According to the stages of internal branding (see *Chapter 5: Stages of internal branding*), this should happen by improving understanding, identification, commitment and behaviour. Applying this theory to the context of the Living the brand program constructs the following learning journey for employees.

## Understand

- Comprehend how WeTransfer's brand ideologies translate into employee behaviour.
- Know what kind of characteristic behaviour is championed at WeTransfer.

## Identify

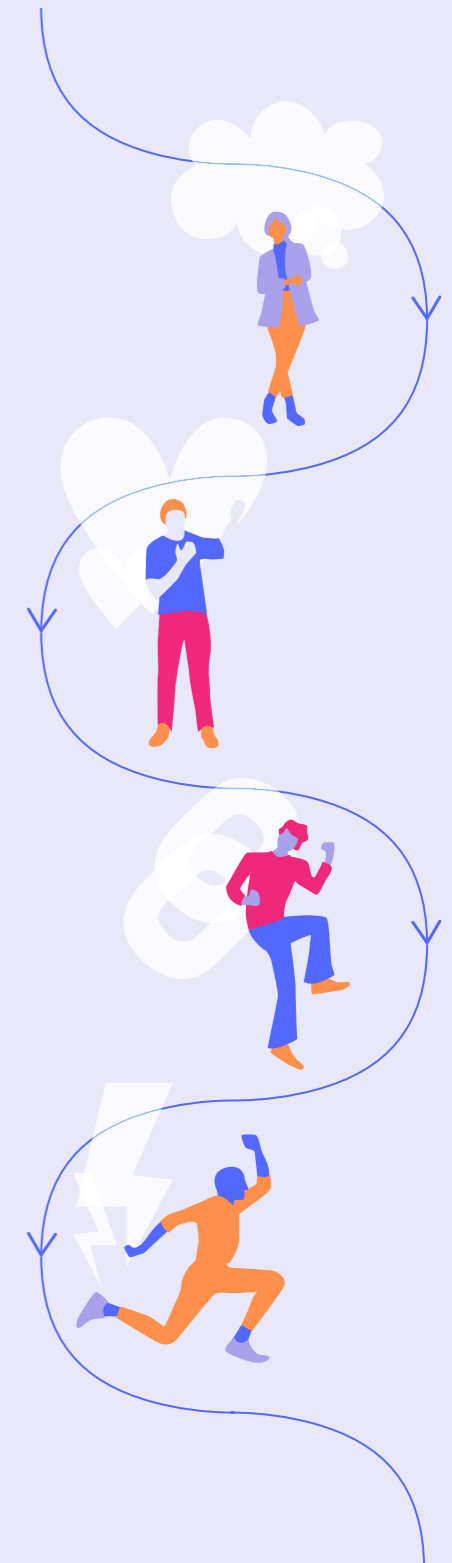
- Find out what their personal principles for behaviour are and what kind of behaviour inspires them.
- Discover how they personally connect to WeTransfer's manifesto principles for behaviour.

## Commit

- Identify their individual role in working in line with the manifesto principles.
- Set goals to better live by the manifesto principles, and thus better deliver the brand promise.

## Behave

- Reflect on how well the manifesto principles are expressed in their current behaviour.
- Be aware of dilemmas they encounter in daily situations, that challenge the manifesto principles.
- Signal good or bad examples of their coworkers' behaviour.





# Roles

## Brand ambassadors (BAs)

Around 20 people throughout the company are appointed to be the brand ambassadors. They lead the program and have the final ownership of the program. Their job is to broker between different parties and to facilitate the discussion about the internal brand, all along the lines of the three main objectives: spread the word, finger on the pulse, and iterate to stay up-to-date [See Figure 12].

## BA coordinator

The brand ambassadors are regulated by the BA coordinator. This person is responsible for the planning and makes sure every brand ambassador is aware of expectations and is equipped with the necessary resources, tools and knowledge. The BA coordinator might be somebody with a background in HR or L&D, who is experienced with coordinating programs.

## Employees

Every single employee is supposed to be involved in the program. The responsibility of employees goes two ways: learning about the manifesto principles and reflecting on them. Altogether, the aim is to have people actively engage with internal branding so that the behavioural guidelines become embedded within the company culture.

## Senior leadership team (SLT)

Although the senior leadership team (SLT) does not have full ownership over the program, because the BAs do, SLT should have the opportunity to steer the program according to the strategic plans of the company. The BAs keep them involved and discuss major iterations of the manifesto with them. Also, if SLT takes any top-down decisions that concern the (internal) brand - for example: revisiting the core values - these decisions are taken along in the program and implemented into the manifesto by the BAs.



FIGURE 12. THE THREE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

- Including a coordinator in the program is a suggestion from expert validation. Ronen Mendelovitz believes "the program needs a mastermind" because it will take effort and dedication to train and activate BAs.
- The key role that SLT plays is emphasised by expert validation. Damian Bradfield suggests that working completely bottom-up has in the past proven to cause insecurities and chaos. There should always be a balance between bottom-up and top-down practices.

# Interaction levels

One of the design requirements is to facilitate interaction on multiple levels. Therefore, the activities that the program consists of are planned to take place in different contexts, ranging from individual to collective. Variance in learning experiences is needed because of multimembership, meaning that an individual might have different teams they work in and differing relationships with coworkers and managers (Wenger, 2000). The program should address as many of these relationships as possible. On the right, an overview shows the possibilities of different types of interaction that can together add up to a rich learning system.

## Individual

- Journal writing
- Survey responding

## Team

- BA meetings
- Team peer-to-peers [See Figure 13]

## Collective

- All-hands
- Information platforms: Magpie, Notion

FIGURE 13. WETRANSFER EMPLOYEES TEAMING UP





# Annual employee journey

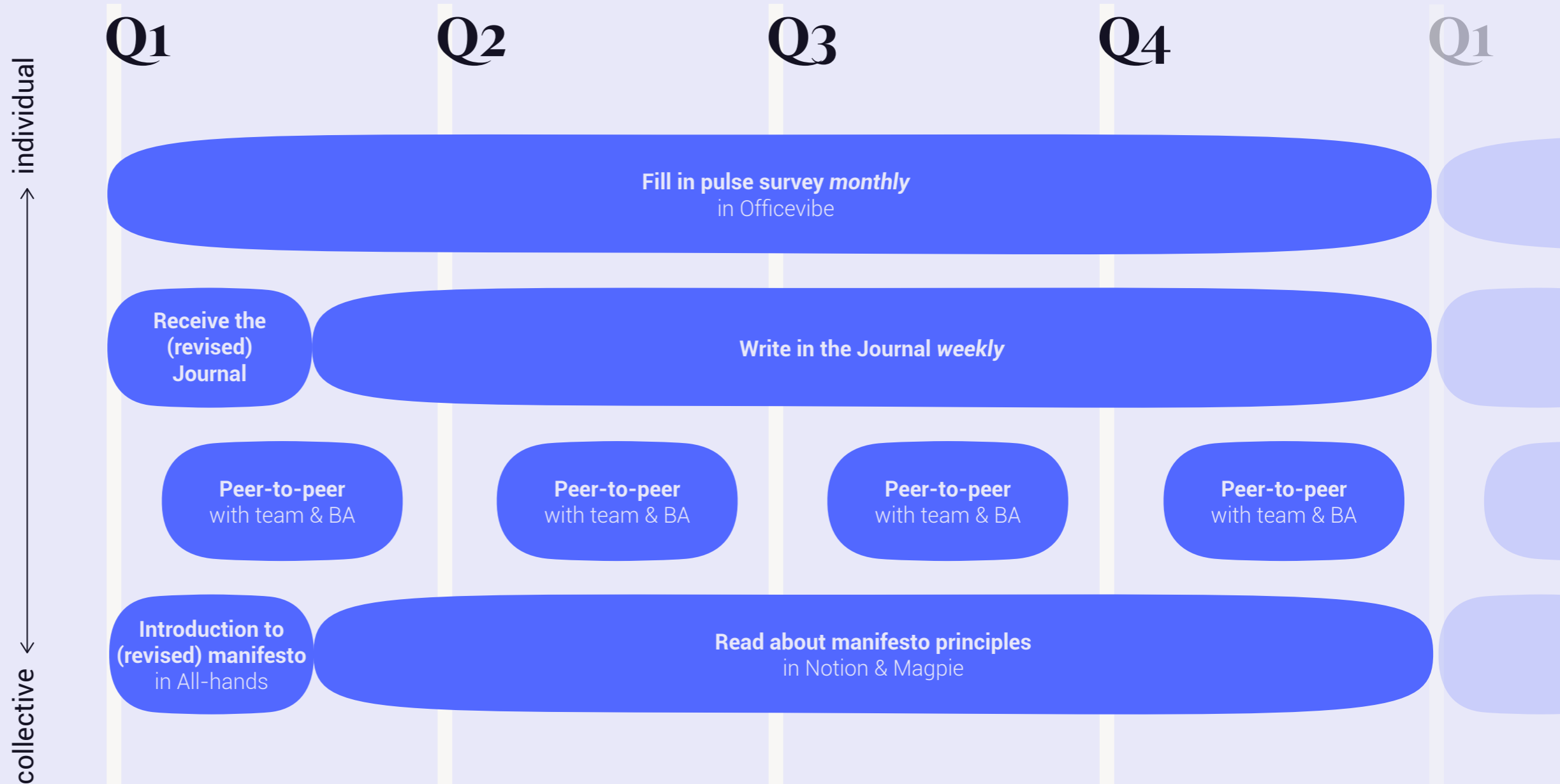
On the right, an overview of a year in the program is given, from the perspective of an employee. In this employee journey, the learning journey is applied to the multiple interaction levels described on the previous page.

The program is designed for the long term. Every year, the situation is reviewed and potentially, changes to the manifesto are pursued. From there on, employees continue to learn from and reflect on the manifesto. The program is thus designed in yearly loops.

### Onboarding

The onboarding journey is an important part of the employee experience at WeTransfer. During this period, new employees are introduced to WeTransfer's people, products and ways of working. The manifesto will surely need to be part of the onboarding process. This could happen in the shape of a presentation by a BA, elaborating on the manifesto with examples and stories. Alternatively or additionally, new employees could participate in an exercise to find their own principles for behaviour and connect those to WeTransfer's principles.

The activities in the journey are described in detail on [page 108](#) and further.

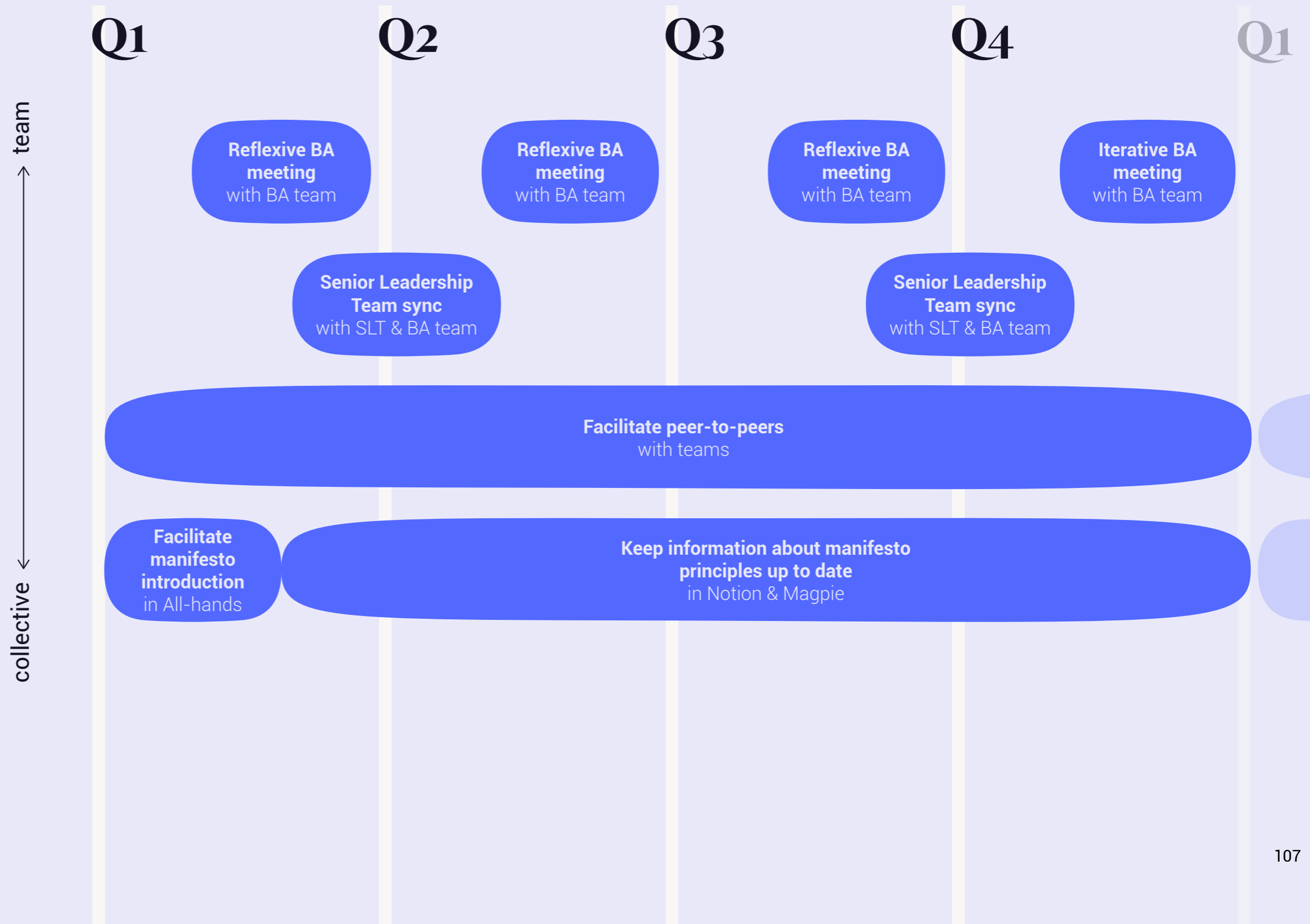


# Annual brand ambassador journey

Brand ambassadors involve in spreading the word and keeping a finger on the pulse throughout the year. Towards the end of the year, they focus on iterating to stay up-to-date. They determine if any changes should be made to the manifesto. At the beginning of the new year, the revision is published and the yearly loop starts over. On the right, an overview of a year in the program from the perspective of a brand ambassador is given. •

The activities in the journey are described in detail on [page 108](#) and further.

- Following a suggestion from expert validation with Kees de Kruijf, the program was kept compact to maintain feasibility. Initially, an extra set of focus group sessions was planned, but those were eventually integrated with the peer-to-peers.



# Activities

On the pages that follow, all activities that together make up the Living the brand program are discussed in detail. A short description of the activity is given along with an indication of how the outcomes will be used. Also, accompanying instruction canvases are created. These canvases guide brand ambassadors in executing the activities.

## Pulse survey

### AIM OF THE ACTIVITY

Gather data that allows brand ambassadors to keep an eye on the internal brand alignment.

### LEVEL OF INTERACTION

Individual

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED

Finger on the pulse

### FREQUENCY

Every month, questions are sent out via Officevibe

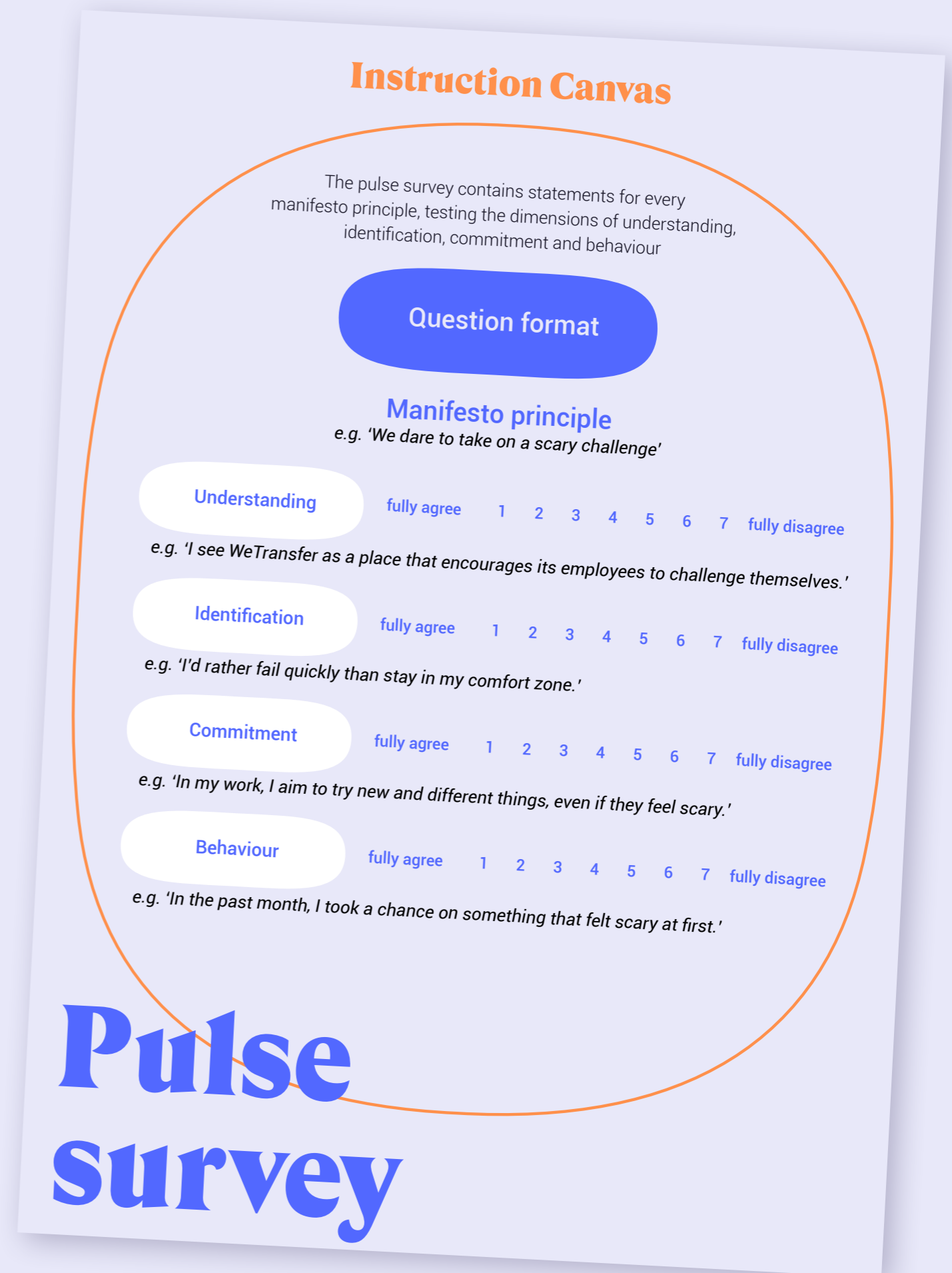
### Description

The pulse check is integrated into the currently existing infrastructure of Officevibe. Every month, employees answer questions that relate to one manifesto principle. That way, every principle gets tested twice a year and progress can be tracked, because questions stay the same. The goal is to gain insight into how well employees are understanding the principles (i.e. to what extent they cognitively associate them with WeTransfer), to what extent they identify with the principles (i.e. if their own values align with the manifesto principles), whether or not employees commit to the principles (i.e. if they set clear goals to adhere to the principles) and how the principles

are reflected in behaviour (i.e. if their behaviour actually shows what is stated in the principles).

### The outcomes...

Are discussed in the BAs' reflexive session. They will evaluate to what extent employees adhere to each of the principles. If any remarkable issues show up, the BAs decide what needs to happen in order to address these. That could mean paying extra attention to the principle in question or making changes to the principle in the iterative session.





## Peer-to-peers

### “Manifesto mindfulness”

#### AIM OF THE ACTIVITY

Help teams support each other in integrating the manifesto principles into their daily practices.

#### LEVEL OF INTERACTION

Team (in groups of about 10; large teams can be split up, small teams merged)

#### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED

Spread the word & Finger on the pulse

#### FREQUENCY

Every quarter, a team has a peer-to-peer

### Description

In quarterly 2-hour peer-to-peers, employees are stimulated to be mindful of the manifesto. The peer-to-peer format encourages them to ask good questions and listen well to others, two traits that are important at WeTransfer as reflected in the manifesto principles. A brand ambassador is present at these meetings to facilitate, but the ultimate aim is to make coworkers advise each other on issues relating to putting the manifesto principles to practice. I will propose a structure for these meetings, but brand ambassadors and teams should be allowed to freely adapt the format to what works best for them. For example, if they feel the most valuable discussions arise from success stories, they can choose to focus more on these than on dilemmas.

### The outcomes...

- Are listed by the brand ambassadors as key take-aways for the participants; these take-aways will keep the manifesto a top-of-mind topic of conversation within the team.
- Are taken along as input to reflexive BA meetings. The brand ambassador will list insights into how the manifesto principles are perceived by employees and what issues teams run into.

## Instruction Canvas

Manifesto mindfulness takes place in the shape of a team peer-to-peer meeting facilitated by a BA.

### Input

Two people from the team **bring a story**. This could be a dilemma they faced - a situation that made it difficult for them to apply the manifesto principles. It can also be a success story - a situation where they were supported by the manifesto principles in deciding what to do. For this, employees can use the **'special moment' cards** from the journal.

### Agenda

#### 1. Tell the story

The employee first takes time to sketch the situation in detail, so that the others get an idea of what issue or success the employee came across.

#### 2. Ask questions

Secondly, the group can ask questions. This part is meant to show interest and empathise with the person in question to get a deeper understanding of the situation. The group is not allowed to give opinions just yet.

#### 3. Give advice

Then, it is time for the group to give advice. Here, the team will practise applying the principles to real-life situations. The brand ambassador will make sure coworkers keep listening well to each others' arguments. Every team member can express their considerations and finally, the person who brought the story will conclude which advice they think is valuable to take along in the future.

### Output

The BA summarises the most important learnings from the peer-to-peer in a list of key take-aways and communicates this to the team.

# Manifesto mindfulness

# BA meetings

## AIM OF THE ACTIVITY

Reflect on the current state of affairs of the program and the manifesto principles and decide if/which iterations should be made to the manifesto.

## LEVEL OF INTERACTION

Team (BAs)

## PROGRAM OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED

Iterate to stay up-to-date

## FREQUENCY

Every quarter

## Description

The brand ambassadors will gather at least four times a year, for about 1.5 hours, to discuss everything they have noticed in 'the field'.

These meetings are planned and facilitated by the BA coordinator. Insights from the pulse survey, peer-to-peers, SLT meetings and hear-say are combined to paint a picture of how it is going. Three of these meetings are focused on reflecting, but the last meeting is meant to determine and detail possible iterations to the manifesto, in order to publish a revised manifesto (and journal) at the beginning of the next year.

### Reflexive BA meetings

When reflecting on the manifesto and how well its principles are followed by employees, brand ambassadors explore the nuances and extremes of those principles. They share all knowledge they have gained over the past quarter to consider the extreme, the exception, the sacrifice, the aim and the rebellion of the principles. This

method will lay bare any tensions that arise when putting the principles into practice. Also, it will help brand ambassadors build a more detailed understanding of what the manifesto principles mean to employees.

### Iterative BA meetings

The last meeting of the year is meant to pursue changes to the manifesto. All results of the reflexive BA meetings are integrated to see if any considerable issues come up. The BAs then tweak the manifesto to stay up-to-date with the company's identity and strategy. This can mean changing the wording of one of the principles or adding or removing a principle altogether. The contents of the journal are updated accordingly.

### The outcomes...

Are presented and discussed in the BA/SLT sync. Eventually, the improvements to the manifesto and the journal are finalised and presented in the next All-hands.

## Instruction Canvas

BAs get together every quarter in a reflexive or iterative meeting. This meeting is meant to discuss the current state of affairs of the internal brand alignment.

### Agenda Reflexive meeting

#### 1. Discuss specialties

If there are any specific topics or relevant notices that should be addressed, these are first discussed.

#### 2. Discuss principles

Second, every manifesto principle is separately discussed, based on gained insights from activities throughout the quarter. To do that, a set structure is followed. The following elements of the principle are considered:

The **extreme**; when is this principle pushed to the ultimate extreme?

The **exception**; in what case is this principle not desirable?

The **sacrifice**; if we commit to this principle, what other kinds of behaviour do we have to give up?

The **aim**; what (change) do we want to achieve by adhering to this principle?

The **rebellion**; how does this principle set us apart from other companies?

### Agenda Iterative meeting

#### 1. Focus principles

The take-aways from all reflexive meetings are put together to determine the manifesto principles that should be focused on in this meeting.

#### 2. Iterations

If needed, iterations on a manifesto principle are designed to be consequently discussed with SLT and pursued.

# BA meeting

## BA/SLT sync

### AIM OF THE ACTIVITY

Bring insights into the state of affairs around the manifesto and the program to the SLT and give the SLT the opportunity to steer things in a certain direction that matches the company strategy.

### LEVEL OF INTERACTION

Team (BAs & SLT)

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED

Iterate to stay up-to-date

### FREQUENCY

Every semester

### Description

Although BAs are ultimately responsible for the program and the manifesto, they also function as a switch between the community of employees and leadership. Therefore, they can provide the senior leadership team with valuable information about what is happening internally and to what extent the manifesto is enacted. Two times a year, the BAs will sit down with the SLT to give an update and propose envisioned changes in the program or in the manifesto (if any). The SLT now has the possibility to shed light on the recommendations and express their criticism or approval. Also, this is the moment where the bigger picture of company strategy can be integrated into the manifesto and the program, to keep everything aligned.

## Journal writing

### AIM OF THE ACTIVITY

Engage employees in the manifesto on a daily basis and make them connect to and commit to the principles on a personal level.

### LEVEL OF INTERACTION

Individual

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED

Spread the word + finger on the pulse

### FREQUENCY

Approximately every week

## Manifesto introduction

### AIM OF THE ACTIVITY

Get together company-wide to announce the (revised version of the) manifesto and hand out the (latest edition of the) journal.

### LEVEL OF INTERACTION

Collective

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED

Spread the word

### FREQUENCY

Every year

### Description

Every year, a revision of the manifesto and, thus, of the journal takes place. The manifesto has been improved based on all data the BAs have gathered. A brand ambassador All-hands take-over will be organised to update all employees on the renewed version of the manifesto. Right after that All-hands, the new journals are shipped that employees can use for the year ahead. In Notion, the current version of the manifesto is always available. BAs make sure the information in Notion is up-to-date. Special or remarkable stories - e.g. when the revised journal is published or when somebody does something that illustrates the manifesto in an inspiring way - will be shared in the Magpie, WeTransfer's internal newsletter. BAs keep track of such stories and make sure they are included in internal communications.

### Description

There are no restrictions or obligations to journal writing. However, employees are encouraged to write in the journal weekly, to stay in the flow of learning about and reflecting on the manifesto. Engagement is required to make this activity work as envisioned, as discussed more elaborately in [Chapter 16: Discussion](#). In times when employees face many challenges or behavioural dilemmas, they might feel like writing more often. Also, if a person has just been onboarded, it might be valuable for them to spend some more time using the journal to get acquainted with the principles. As some outcomes are required as input for peer-to-peer sessions, these exercises are essential for employees to complete. Interacting with the journal will also prime employees to focus more on brand-related behaviour and will allow them to better evaluate during the pulse surveys (Lavrakas, 2008).

### The outcomes...

Are partly used as input for the manifesto mindfulness: peer-to-peer sessions. But mostly, interacting with the journal is meant to activate employees to engage with the manifesto and ultimately, increase their brand-related understanding, identification, commitment and behaviour.



# Journal design and contents

## MVP test

As described in the section *'Walk-in session'* in *Chapter 12: Developing the manifesto*, an MVP test was done to validate the concept of a journal. Overall, employees seemed enthusiastic about the idea of receiving a personal journal to engage with the manifesto. They shared ideas and wished as to the content of the journal. From the input participants gave, three main focus points were deducted.

- Make it frequent (e.g. once a day)
- Make it personal
- Make it attractive (stickers, comics)

## Principles

The manifesto principles form the basis of the journal. Every principle makes up a section of the journal, which thus adds up to six sections. The sections contain interactions (exercises, stories, reflection moments) relating to the manifesto principle. Because the manifesto consists of two parts ('we dare to...' and 'we care to...'), the journal does too. One side contains the daring principles and the other side describes the caring principles, to emphasise the duality of the behavioural principles. The booklet can be flipped around and opened from both sides [See Figure 14].

## Education and reflection

The journal enables a feedback loop going back and forth: it both educates employees on the manifesto principles and gives employees the possibility to reflect on those principles. This two-way communication is applied to the four stages of internal branding, in order to educate

employees on all levels and to gather feedback on all levels. These stages are brand understanding, brand identification, brand commitment and brand-citizenship behaviour (see *Chapter 5: Stages of internal branding*). The exercises the journal contains are thus based on these four areas.

## A yearly revision

Every employee will receive the journal at the beginning of their employment. Since the journal aims to iterate on the manifesto, an improved version will be published every year, containing the latest iteration of the manifesto, as pursued by the brand ambassadors. This also gives employees the possibility to start with a clean slate once their journal is filled up.



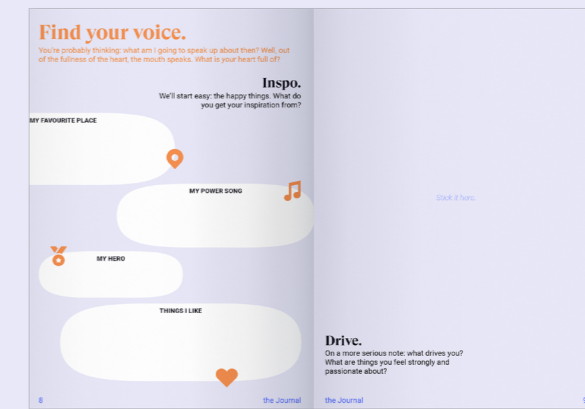
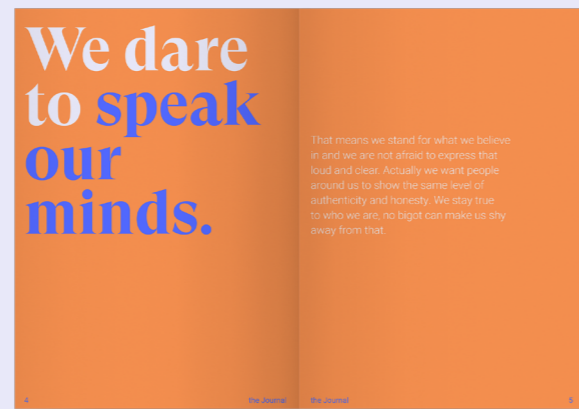
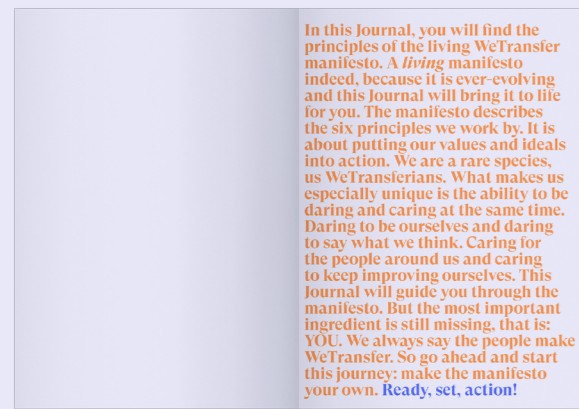
FIGURE 14. MOCK-UP OF THE JOURNAL COVER



# Journal design of one section

To demonstrate what the content and tone of voice of the journal should be like, one section is designed. It concerns the section of the manifesto principle 'we dare to speak our minds'. The contents of the section are based on the four stages of internal branding, as indicated. To see all pages in a larger format, see *Appendix Y: Design of one journal section*.

To **make it frequent**, a tracker is added to biweekly reflect on alignment between behaviour and the manifesto principle. To **make it attractive**, interactive elements such as stickers, fold outs and moving parts are added. To **make it personal**, personal questions are asked and individual remarkable moments are emphasised.

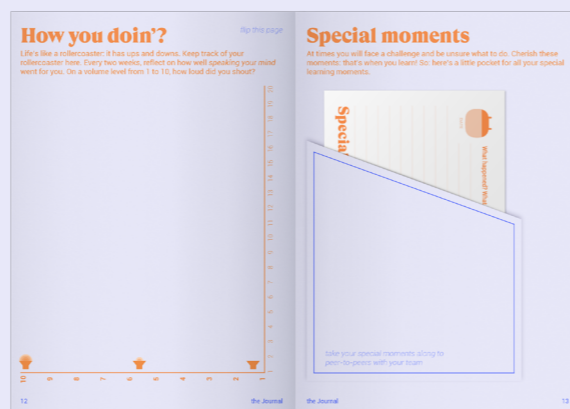


[understanding]

[identification]

[commitment]

[behaviour]



# Validation with experts

With three experts, the desirability, viability and feasibility of the program proposal were assessed to get an idea of the overall value of the design (Calabretta et al., 2018) [See *Appendix cD: Expert validation* for an in-depth description of these interviews].

## Desirability

Experts perceive the program as desirable, on the notion that it should be well executed. From a company perspective, Damian Bradfield believes this could be a valuable solution to get everybody on the same page internally. This is increasingly important to focus on for a growing company; whereas alignment was a more organic process in WeTransfer's early days, it is now required to put in more effort to reach every employee. The program can help do just that.

“As the company grows, you have to spend more time doing ‘Sunday service’; making sure people understand the narrative of what the company stands for. As it changes, too, because it doesn’t stay the same. And I think this could be super valuable.”

- Damian Bradfield

From an employee perspective, Ronen Mendelovitz explains, it can help reconnect individuals to the company. Currently, not every employee feels heard. A solution like the Living

“People currently leave because they feel disconnected from the company.”

- Ronen Mendelovitz

the brand program shows that WeTransfer commits to walking the talk and wants to engage its employees. Ronen pleads it is important to bring values to life. Also, it is needed, since most people do not even know our company values now.

Desirability also concerns whether or not employees would be willing to join and, potentially, even take the role of brand ambassador. According to Ronen and Damian, participation should not be a problem, especially since the program feels like it makes sense and fits WeTransfer's way of working. They do however stress the importance of really connecting to the employees and expressing the relevance of the Living the brand program. Employees need to know why they are participating in something. Kees de Kruijf mentions that the journal has the potential to increase engagement, because it allows for daily interaction.

## Feasibility

Regarding the feasibility of the program, all experts point out it all relies on commitment. As Damian says, “there's never enough time and money, it's more do you have the willing”. Ronen and Kees expect the program will be feasible, if the brand ambassadors dedicate sufficient time to this. Ronen feels the appointment of a mastermind, like the BA coordinator, is essential to keep the program rolling. Learning & development and internal communications are the right people to own this topic and set up the program.

“We need to speak to the hearts of the people.”

- Ronen Mendelovitz

“This felt like it was already in existence in WeTransfer, so I'd say that's a fit.”

- Damian Bradfield

## Viability

If the program is to be embraced by employees, brand ambassadors and leadership, it has the potential to deliver on several business objectives. As said, disconnection between the company and the people currently causes employees to leave. Rebuilding that connection could, according to Ronen, thus contribute to retention. The experts also believe that if employees are happy, customers will also be happier and more loyal to the brand. The authenticity of WeTransfer will be positively impacted, as the program (and manifesto) shows commitment to walking the talk. In the long term, Damian sees possibilities to employ the manifesto as a tool for recruitment and to increase brand awareness.

It is important to note that the Living the brand program is not a stand-alone solution, mentions Damian. WeTransfer will always stay dependent on delivering great products, having motivated teams, and many other elements. However, this program does have the potential to contribute to many objectives if done well.

- The design proposal to illustrate the strategy consists of two interlinked parts:
  - a **WeTransfer manifesto** to internally concretise the brand
  - a **Living the brand program** to activate the manifesto and spark discussion
- The WeTransfer manifesto is developed in **two co-creative sessions** with employees.
- The Living the brand program is facilitated by **brand ambassadors**. The program entails a **yearly loop** of activities that enable guidance by and reflection on the manifesto. The activities on varying interaction levels take employees through their **learning journey** of understanding, identifying with, committing to and finally, behaving in line with the manifesto.
- The manifesto is included in a **personal journal**, that functions as a boundary object in the program.
- The Living the brand program is **validated with three experts** on viability, feasibility and desirability.

TAKEAWAYS  
PART V.  
DESIGN



# VI. Implementation

[Background](#)[Research](#)[Strategy](#)[Design](#)[Implementation](#)

## A roadmap to roll out the Living the brand program

This part dives deeper into the roll-out of the Living the brand program. In order for the program to be successful, it has to be prepared and executed well. What is more, when the program has been running well for some time, it has the potential to be extended to external branding activities. In this part, the required non-human and human resources are first elaborated on. Then, the actual roll-out is envisioned in a roadmap that consists of three phases.

**Chapters in this part**

14. Required resources

15. Roadmap for roll-out

# 14 Required resources

The success of a brand ambassador program like Living the brand is largely determined by the invested resources (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018). For the proposal to be feasible, it is important to create clarity about the required investment (Calabretta et al., 2018). This chapter shows the two most essential types of resources needed to execute this program, non-human and human. First, the physical materials, artifacts, that support the program are discussed. Then, the next section sheds light on brand ambassadorship as part of a job description, in order to help brand ambassadors dedicate time to the program.

## Materials

### Living the brand package

As mentioned before, a learning program can effectively be supported by artifacts (see the section *'Boundary object: a journal'* in Chapter 10: *Idea: WeTransfer manifesto and Living the brand program*). Below, an overview is given of the artifacts that are needed in the Living the brand program. Part of these materials are already designed in this project, but part should still be finalised in preparation of the launch of the program. Altogether, a Living the brand package is composed that holds all physical artifacts that are fundamental to make the program work [See Figure 15].

Clearly, the **WeTransfer manifesto** is the main artifact that activities evolve around. The manifesto is captured in a boundary object: the **journal**. Furthermore, every activity comes with a supportive **instruction canvas**. Such a canvas explains the main elements of the activity to enable brand ambassadors to execute it properly.

The roadmap in *Chapter 15: Roadmap for roll-out* indicates a timeline for preparatory activities, like finishing the contents of the Living the brand package.

#### What is already designed

- Manifesto
  - The contents
- Journal
  - The cover and introduction
  - One section
- Instruction canvases
  - Pulse survey: question format
  - Manifesto mindfulness canvas
  - BA meeting canvas

#### What still needs to be designed

- Manifesto
  - An attractive one-pager to present the manifesto
- Journal
  - Five sections
- Instruction canvases
  - Pulse survey: all questions written out
  - BA / SLT sync canvas



FIGURE 15. LIVING THE BRAND PACKAGE

# Brand ambassador hours

The success of the Living the brand program is strongly dependent on the dedication and effort put into it. To allow brand ambassadors to commit to their tasks, they should be officially granted working hours to spend on it. That means that being a brand ambassador becomes a part of their job description and is taken along in calculating their workload. To determine how much time is needed from brand ambassadors, a gross calculation is made based on the program activities • [See *Appendix Z: Brand ambassador hours*].

In total, a brand ambassador would thus need to dedicate 140 working hours yearly. Per week, that is approximately 3.1 hours. For someone who works a regular 40-hour working week, this comes down to a little less than half a day per week.

WeTransfer currently consists of around 400 people (rounded off). For every 20 employees, there will be a brand ambassador selected (which currently makes 20 brand ambassadors). With company growth, more brand ambassadors will thus be chosen to keep that ratio intact. •

**20 brand ambassadors (one for every twenty employees) will be selected. An individual should be granted 0.075 FTE\* of their job to spend on their role as brand ambassador.**

\* FTE means full-time equivalent and is a unit to measure workload in a way that makes them comparable although they may work a different number of hours per week (Eurostat, 2022).

Activity	Hours
BA meetings	6
SLT/BA sync	2
Peer-to-peers	14
Updating information	5.5
Preparing sessions, processing results	112.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b> <i>hours per year</i>

In consultation with WeTransfer, an estimation of 0.1 FTE for brand ambassadorship was made. This estimation thus matches the calculation quite accurately. A notion to be made is that for the (re)design of the journal, time of a designer and copywriter also needs to be dedicated. The pilot and the first year that the program is active should point out the exact amount of hours needed. Like similar roles additional to a job description (e.g. being a works council member), brand ambassadorship would be temporary role so that the team composition rotates.

- The estimation of hours per activity and the amount of BAs needed were validated in the expert interview with Kees de Kruijf.





# 15 Roadmap for roll-out

The Living the brand program is designed as a repetitive yearly loop of activities. However, before these activities can be executed as envisioned, the program should be properly prepared and rolled out. A roadmap, shown on pages 130 and 131, specifies a strategic plan to make the proposal reality (Simonse, 2017, p.10).

## Three phases for roll-out

### 1. Prep it

To set up the program, gather the right people and build the required skills and knowledge, a preparation phase is needed. The BA coordinator is the initiator of preparation activities. This phase - assuming it starts now - takes until the start of 2023. The start of the year is a good and clear moment to launch something new. ●

### 2. Launch it

At the beginning of 2023, the Living the brand program can be launched. With the kick-off, an internal campaign takes place to communicate the relevance of the program to all employees. It is important that employees know the 'why' of the activities, as underlined by expert validation. 2023 will be the first year the program runs and is thus internally promoted as 'The year to live our brand'.

*The next page shows the roadmap for roll-out.*

- In expert validation, Ronen Mendelovitz, aided by his knowledge of the way of working at WeTransfer, proposed this timeline.

### 3. Work it

After the year of launch, the program will continue running. If changes in or around the company take place, the activities will help create internal brand alignment again. On top of that, the program can add additional value in this phase.

While the Living the brand program is initially focused internally, it could potentially be of beneficial for the customer brand and the employer brand, too. The research of this project pointed out that WeTransfer's full story is often not known by people outside the company. The WeTransfer manifesto can help improve external brand knowledge as well as show that WeTransfer is committed to act in line with their values. Also, it can be a tool used in recruitment, to find talent that holds the same values; this is done in practice by companies like Netflix (Netflix Jobs, n.d.). ●●

- The potential for externally facing promotion of the brand is stressed by Damian Bradfield in expert validation.

#### TAKEAWAYS PART VI. IMPLEMENTATION

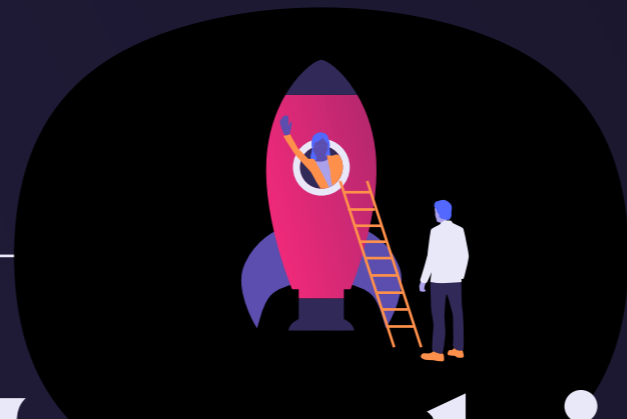
- To roll out the Living the brand program, the **required materials** should be finalised and brand ambassadorship should be included in **job descriptions** with 0.075 FTE.
- The roll-out takes place in three phases:
  - **Prep it**: until 2023, the materials, skills and resources that are needed should be built
  - **Launch it**: 2023 is the year the program is first launched internally
  - **Work it**: after 2023, the program is continued and can be extended to external branding efforts

Now



# Prep it

2023



# Launch it

2024



# Work it

After

Impact

### Clarity

Determine why and how the program exists

### Commitment

Build a BA team that consists of the right people

### Skill

Acquire the skills to make a high-quality program

### Awareness

Create buzz and make the program talk of the day

### Connection

Convince employees of the value of living the brand

### Activation

Internally manifest the brand

### Consistency

Get into the routine of the program

### Agility

Guide the internal brand, also when things change

### Publicity

Tell the story outside the company

People

Main roles



BA coordinator



BAs



SLT



Employees



Users & talent

Supporting roles



Studio (design + copywriting) and HR



Internal comms



Marketing

Effect

Employee satisfaction

Employee retention

Brand promise delivery

Customer satisfaction

Brand authenticity & loyalty

Talent attraction

# VII. Closure

## A look back and a look ahead to wrap up the project.

This part concludes the project. First, limitations to the research and to the outcomes are discussed. These limitations are accompanied by recommendations for further research and design. Then, the contemplation of battles and revelations that came forth in this project are shared. After briefly summarising the relevance of the project for both WeTransfer and the field of branding, the report is concluded with some final words.



# 16 Discussion

## Limitations and recommendations

### CEO switch & company change

#### Limitation

During the time this project was executed, several impactful changes took place at WeTransfer. In January, an announcement of the company's 'intention to float' was put out. A week filled with buzz, excitement and confusion followed. Not much later, the tables turned when we were told that WeTransfer had withdrawn from becoming a public company. In May, an emergency All-hands was organised to inform everybody about a CEO switch and a reorganisation of the senior leadership team that would be pursued a couple of weeks later.

All these happenings illustrate the tumultuous phase WeTransfer is going through. I heard employees tell me about how times are changing, and I also experienced it first-hand. The changes also impacted my project. While I tried to take it all in and learn from all I observed, a graduation project is unfortunately not as agile as I would have liked it to be. For example, in the ideal world, there would have been a chance to investigate what the SLT reorganisation meant for the company and how the design can be adapted to that.

#### Recommendation

In a company that is changing as quickly as WeTransfer, the roll-out of something like the Living the brand program would most likely be paired with several unforeseen circumstances

and developments. The program is designed with the intention to equip WeTransfer with the tools to deal with sudden changes. However, the real make or break for the success of the execution would be the ownership. WeTransfer does not solely function on its processes, it depends on individuals. For the proposal to work out, a person or a team should thus take the lead in this and spread awareness, enthusiasm and a sense of urgency (most likely in the proposed role of BA coordinator). An internal investigation is needed to determine who is suitable to take on this role.

### Engage the people

#### Limitation

The main condition for the program to have its desired effect is to engage employees. Experts mentioned the need to explain the importance of the program to employees. Internal brand alignment concerns all individuals within a company. The Living the brand program expects employees to attend scheduled activities, but also encourages them to spend time learning and reflecting independently. For that, genuine engagement is required and if the motivation is not there, a risk exists of the program being less effective.

#### Recommendation

Therefore, I recommend that WeTransfer pays particular attention to engagement creation during the roll-out of the Living the brand program. This should for one be done by being clear about ownership, like described above. Next to that, it could be necessary to include a mandatory element in the first phase of the program. Although the ultimate ambition is to intrinsically motivate employees to actively participate, more regulation could be needed to get them started, for example to schedule a set time slot every week for journal writing.

### Role of B Corp

#### Limitation

B Corp values have been named as one of the greatest reasons to work at WeTransfer and are often talk of the day on the work floor. While working on this project, I have often wondered what the role of B Corp would be in internal brand management, or in the brand as a whole. In designing the manifesto and the program, that resulted in leaving values that were directly linked to B Corp aside. The reason for that is as follows: I believe that these B Corp values are surely interrelated with 'regular' brand values, but should not play the main role in the brand. The B Corp certification has shaped decision-making within WeTransfer to what it is today, so should be taken along as a relevant part of the WeTransfer brand (L. Ruiz, personal communication, January 10, 2022). Just like the 'regular' brand, CSR (corporate social responsibility) efforts should be supported by internal alignment (Carlini & Grace, 2021). However, I believe it is important not to lose sight of the aspects that characterise WeTransfer beyond the B Corp. Many companies recently focus all their brand efforts on social responsibility because this is something customers increasingly want to see. That does not benefit the differentiation of brands in the market. Especially since CSR strategy will eventually become a necessity based on natural boundaries and policy-making, WeTransfer should cherish its core values alongside the B Corp values (Kell, 2018).

#### Recommendation

For WeTransfer to stay true to its identity and take that forward into the future, it is important to determine the connection between B Corp values and the brand identity. Besides investigating what the positioning of WeTransfer within B Corp is - as is currently done by CSR leaders at the company (L. Ruiz, personal communication, January 10, 2022; WeTransfer, 2022d) -, it is

crucial to investigate the role of B Corp in the brand. That means asking: which of the B Corp values are 'permission-to-play', baseline values that WeTransfer wants to commit to but that do not set the company apart and which of the B Corp values really touch upon why the company exists in the first place (Lencioni, 2002)? When the role of B Corp has been clarified, the insights can be implemented in the program and/or in the manifesto.

### Varying and honest perspectives

#### Limitation

With the sampling of the interviews, I aimed to select a group of people with as much diversity as possible. However, it appeared that employees based in Amsterdam were not only a majority but also easier to reach and schedule meetings with within the limited timeframe of the project. This impacts the variety of perspectives taken along in this project. Another notion that can be made regarding bias and perspectives, is that the walk-in session for validation of the manifesto did not provide blind/anonymous responses. The reason for this is that the walk-in session was designed to match the experiential value of the Offsite (the event where the session took place). Possibly, participants could have been biased when responding to the dilemmas by the post-its that were already up on the wall.

#### Recommendations

In the persuasion of internal brand management at WeTransfer, ensuring varying and unbiased perspectives is desired. Further research should be undertaken to investigate the difference in views caused by working location, especially because culture can have a considerable influence on the perception and support of the brand (as seen in the case study of IKEA, discussed in *Chapter 4: Internal branding in practice*). Also, internal brand alignment is a sensitive topic that touches upon personal traits and beliefs of individuals. To create alignment, honesty of employees is crucial. Therefore, the Living the brand program should allow for anonymous and unbiased feedback, for example through anonymous surveys.



## Start from the inside

### Limitation

This aim of this project is to internalise WeTransfer's values. As described in [Chapter 9: Two-step strategy](#), the final design proposal focuses specifically on the internal concretisation of those values, by defining a set of principles (the WeTransfer manifesto). WeTransfer's current values were found to have vanished from the attention of employees and need to be updated. This revision would take more time and resources than this graduation project allows. Thus, in order to define the principles, an assumption was made regarding the core values of WeTransfer. Freedom, creativity and humanity were found to be underlying drivers and thus adopted as the core values for the course of this project. However, the phrasing of those is not yet refined and no thorough research has been done to specify the values because it was out of scope for this project.

### Recommendation

The Living the brand program would fully come into its own if it is backed by a solid set of core values (and possibly corresponding company and brand values). This would help employees deduce the 'why' behind certain desired behaviour. I am aware that plans exist to revisit the brand values as well as the company values. My suggestion is for WeTransfer to first define the underlying set of core values, possibly aided by the findings of this research. The findings showed that under the surface, employees are ideologically largely aligned. Thus, it is most likely that the core values that would be developed will match the WeTransfer manifesto. Where necessary, the manifesto could be tweaked to new values as described in the Living the brand program.

## Tell the world

### Limitation

Rather a notion than a limitation, is that the Living the brand program is not an alone-standing solution. Internal brand alignment is at the core of building a strong brand but does not guarantee one. [Chapter 4: Practice of internal branding](#) stresses the internal and external objectives of internal branding: happy employees and happy customers. The first step in achieving those is the internal brand alignment, to make employees feel happy and fulfilled. The next step is for employees to deliver the brand promise well to customers, in order to make them satisfied and loyal. Thus: the internal branding strategy should be extended with external branding efforts to achieve the full effect. The third phase in [Chapter 15: Roadmap for roll-out](#) describes possibilities for this extension of the program.

### Recommendation

After WeTransfer has taken steps forward in internal brand alignment, further work is required to communicate the values and manifestation to the outside: mostly, their customers and potential new employees. Since WeTransfer employees prove to be great advocates for their brand (see [Chapter 7: Research results](#)), there is much potential for an external brand campaign fueled by employees. WeTransfer could take a stance by speaking up about the importance of internal brand alignment and by publishing the manifesto. This way, the company expresses their true identity and shows commitment. An external 'Living the brand' campaign could help strengthen customer relationships and loyalty, increase brand equity and authenticity and attract talent (see [Chapter 4: Internal branding in practice](#)).





# Contemplation

## Battles & revelations

Executing this project has taught me an incredible amount of things. Besides bringing me subject-specific knowledge, professional abilities and life skills, the process has also made me contemplate certain subjects. The most relevant challenges or thoughts are described below.

### Beat/be the best

Starting off at WeTransfer, I soon noticed what a pleasant place to work it was. Many employees share this opinion: WeTransfer indeed is already a great employer. This brought up the question: how much impact can I actually have here? The room for improvement seemed at times limited, because of the many efforts WeTransfer already puts into living their values and keeping their workers happy.

That is, until the realisation that the reason why WeTransfer is doing well on several fronts is that they always seek improvement. The key to functioning to the best of your ability is to not be too easily satisfied. WeTransfer's employees stay critical and curious. Many of them told me that the project I was working on was exactly what WeTransfer needed. Good is not always good enough. Therefore, WeTransfer has the potential to not just do good at internal brand alignment, but become an exemplary leader in this. In the future, I see them becoming one of the first public companies that are authentic and purpose-driven, specifically because they always keep questioning how things can get even better.

### Make it happen

I believe a company should start with 'why'. This is what the most recent stream of branding evolves around and what makes authentic brands. However, working at WeTransfer taught me about the fundamental value of products. The core business of WeTransfer is making great products and stories for its users. And thus, I regard the design proposal in the following context: the Living the brand program is a valuable way to align employees on the bigger picture, but it will only have its envisioned effects if the core business of the company holds up - and WeTransfer keeps creating 'beautifully obvious' products. In other words, the notion is to start with why, but equally invest in the how and the what.

### Brand scepticism

Although all employees were very supportive of the relevance of internal brand alignment, a sentiment that can sometimes be sensed - within and outside WeTransfer - is that this process should flow organically. Actually, I share that sentiment to some extent. Regulating and 'processising' the alignment of employees is something that feels unnatural. However, I have learned that, especially within a growing company, certain things need to be embedded in organisational processes and structures.

The same scepticism exists as to the benefits of (internal) branding efforts. The value of a strong brand identity is intangible and thus difficult to communicate. Personally, I absolutely believe that sharing a common bigger goal and aligning on ideologies helps companies thrive. However, this statement is hard to underpin with solid objectives or numbers. I am happy to see the age of purpose coming to existence, because it deepens the understanding and connotations people have with the concept of branding. Proving the value of internal branding is a battle that will continue on, in the field of branding and in society as a whole, but progress is showing.

# Implications

### Relevance for WeTransfer

This project proposes the WeTransfer manifesto and the Living the brand program as a solution to create internal brand activation and alignment at WeTransfer. However, the design proposal is not *the only* solution. The main value of this project are the fundamentals that led to the design. The previous chapters build a case to internally concretise the brand and, importantly, make the topic live within the company. In my research and co-creative sessions, I found that making employees actively think about what they value and how they enact that is key.

The research outcomes also offer WeTransfer insight into what the primary values of their employees are and how these can be translated into behaviour. This insight can potentially serve as input for future brand- or culture-related decision-making, such as the reformation of the values.

### Relevance for the field of branding

The manifesto and program that are designed in this project are carefully and intentionally tailored to the context of WeTransfer. That means that the solution cannot be one-on-one applied in other cases, because every company would have different challenges and needs to solve. However, this project does offer a case study of applying the theory of internal branding to a specific client in a way that suits the company. The project illustrates how the stages of internal branding can be leading in several phases of the research and design process. The sequence of 'understanding the brand, identifying the brand, committing to the brand and behaving in line with the brand' forms a framework that connects theory to practice. This implication structures internal brand management according to the contemporary philosophy of internal branding from an employee perspective (see [Chapter 3: Internal branding in theory](#)).



## All in all,

This thesis set out to internally align WeTransfer's employees with the brand. The company is experiencing a period of rapid growth and because of that, getting or keeping everybody on the same page is increasingly important and challenging. Fragmentation in the understanding of values is sprouting and, because of the company's expansion, a risk exists that employees' brand interpretation falls apart even further and they become disconnected.

To bring clarity to the purpose and values of the company, a manifesto is created that expresses behavioural traits that are characteristic for WeTransfer. To activate this manifesto internally and bring the topic of internal branding to life, a Living the brand program is developed. The intend of the program is to open up the conversation and provide WeTransfer with the tools to create alignment in a way that suits their business.

My hopes are that the insight this project brings will help WeTransfer gear up for the promising future ahead of them. How beautiful the good old times might have been, it is now time for WeTransferians to look ahead - without forgetting where they came from. Seeking alignment will bring direction and help WeTransfer move forward as one. I cannot wait for what's to come.





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