



The Transformer's Paradox: Global Brand Transformation

**Why the best marketing leaders
transform less and achieve more**

In partnership with:

Ogilvy Consulting | **WPP**



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Thank you to our inspiring marketing leaders for giving inputs into this report



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Introduction

The strongest marketing leaders in the world share a surprising secret: **they transform less than their peers.**

Not because they are complacent, not because they are behind, but because they have mastered something far more valuable than the mechanics of change: knowing where their leadership creates genuine value, and where it creates vulnerabilities. They build leadership teams that compensate for precisely those gaps.

After six months of research, interviewing and surveying some of the most successful global CMOs across industries, geographies, and organizational contexts, we expected to uncover a better roadmap for transformation. Instead, we uncovered something altogether more powerful: self-knowledge is what eliminates the churn.

To understand why that finding is so striking, consider what the industry has been telling us transformation requires. A Google search for “Marketing Transformation” returns over 64 million results. There are frameworks, roadmaps, MarTech stacks, implementation guides, and customer *journey* maps — a near-infinite supply of guidance on *what* to transform and *how* to do it technically.

And yet, organizations keep failing at it.

What has been almost entirely absent from the conversation is the one variable that our research shows matter most: **the human leading the transformation.** Not the strategy they choose, not the technology they deploy, but who they *are*: how they instinctively see the world, define problems, and mobilize change.

“Our most critical insight is that marketing leadership’s dominant archetype is simultaneously the brand’s greatest strength and its potential vulnerability. It is not only the lens through which they view the world, the tool they reach for first, or the area where they deliver the most value. It’s also the area where they are most likely to over-index, creating predictable points of failure if left unbalanced.”



Stephan Loerke
Chief Executive Officer
WFA



Antonis Kocheilas
Global President,
Strategy & Solutions
WPP

And critically, whether that approach is the right match for what their organization actually needs at that precise moment.

In a marketplace flooded with 64 million opinions on marketing transformation, we believe this research offers something genuinely different: **not another roadmap, but a mirror.**

The question it asks is not, *“What should you transform?”* Rather, it asks, *“Who are you as a leader and is that who your organization needs you to be right now?”*

Your answer may be the most important strategic insight you gain this year.

Methodology

This report is based on research conducted jointly by WFA and Ogilvy Consulting, combining three complementary approaches:

1. In-depth qualitative interviews with more than 20 senior marketing leaders — including CMOs and chief digital officers across industries from organizations such as L’Oréal, Mondelēz, HP Inc, Unilever, Kenvue, and Zurich Insurance — to explore how they conceive, lead, and sustain marketing transformation.

2. A short snap survey of 60 WFA members and Ogilvy clients capturing current transformation drivers, leadership priorities, functional scope, and outlook for the next five years.
3. A meta-analysis and literature review of existing transformation frameworks, industry research, and academic sources to contextualize findings and identify gaps in the current body of knowledge.

Together, these inputs enabled the identification of five core tensions facing marketing leaders today and four distinct leadership archetypes that shape how those tensions are navigated.

“For Ogilvy Consulting, observing and understanding human behavior is ingrained in everything we do. Our conversations with marketing leaders, as well as the survey results confirmed that by focusing on people and your human leadership qualities, increases the likelihood of transformation success. These insights from industry leaders are invaluable to our clients and will help the entire industry to transform for the better.”



Ashley Wood
Managing Director
North America,
Ogilvy Consulting



Mark Dewings
Managing Director
UK, Ogilvy
Consulting

Holding a mirror, not a map

What separates transformational success from failure isn't budget, technology, or even strategic clarity. It's something far more human: the fundamental approach leaders take to change itself.

We've all seen it: the ambitious initiatives that fizzle out, the massive investments that yield little return, the endless cycles of "transformation" that leave teams exhausted rather than energized. Why? Because while the need for change is universally acknowledged, the way we go about it is anything but. At every WFA gathering, from Amsterdam to NYC, Mumbai to Singapore CMOs say the same thing: we're mid-transformation. The question is, who comes out on the other side?

Understanding these pathways – and your own – may be the difference between transformation that truly transforms, and transformation that simply exhausts. It's the difference between being the CMO that instinctively adapts and thrives, and the CMO whose proven methods, however brilliant, ultimately clash with a new reality. And it's what has led us to develop a framework for self-awareness and strategic team building that can empower CMOs to lead successful transformations anywhere, no matter the challenge.





Transformation is a constant

If there's one truth that echoes across every conversation we've had with marketing leaders, it's this: transformation isn't a temporary project you complete and then move on from. It is, quite simply, the new permanent reality. The leaders we spoke with were unanimous on this point. Transformation is no longer a discrete initiative with a beginning and an end. It is a continuous state of being.

Why this relentless state of flux? Let's be honest, the pressure on marketing to deliver has never been greater. We're caught between intense headwinds, both external and internal.

Internally, the boardroom is less patient than ever, with an insatiable demand for immediate, measurable impact. This pressure, which often clashes with the long-term nature of brand building, forces a reckoning for the CMO role itself. Today's CMOs must contend with not just increasing demands for growth, but also the ability to orchestrate technology, data, and strategy to deliver tangible impact for both the customer and the business.

From the outside, technology has flipped the power dynamic, putting customers firmly in control. Their expectations are now set by their last-best experience,

regardless of the category, and they demand a level of authenticity we've never seen before.

This is all complicated further by the biggest disruptor of all: AI. Is it a friend or a foe? The answer, it seems, is both. On one hand, AI is being hailed as a wonder tool that promises to unlock unprecedented efficiency and personalization. On the other hand, it's the very force threatening to commoditize our craft, making basic execution so accessible that it risks marketing being seen not as a strategic business lever, but as mere executional support.

“I don't like the term transformation because the problem is that the target keeps changing... it's a constant change.”



Pierre-Yves Calloc'h
Global Chief Digital Officer
Pernod Ricard

“We are in permanent transformation, and then we say: perform while transform[ing], because you cannot put the transform separately from perform.”

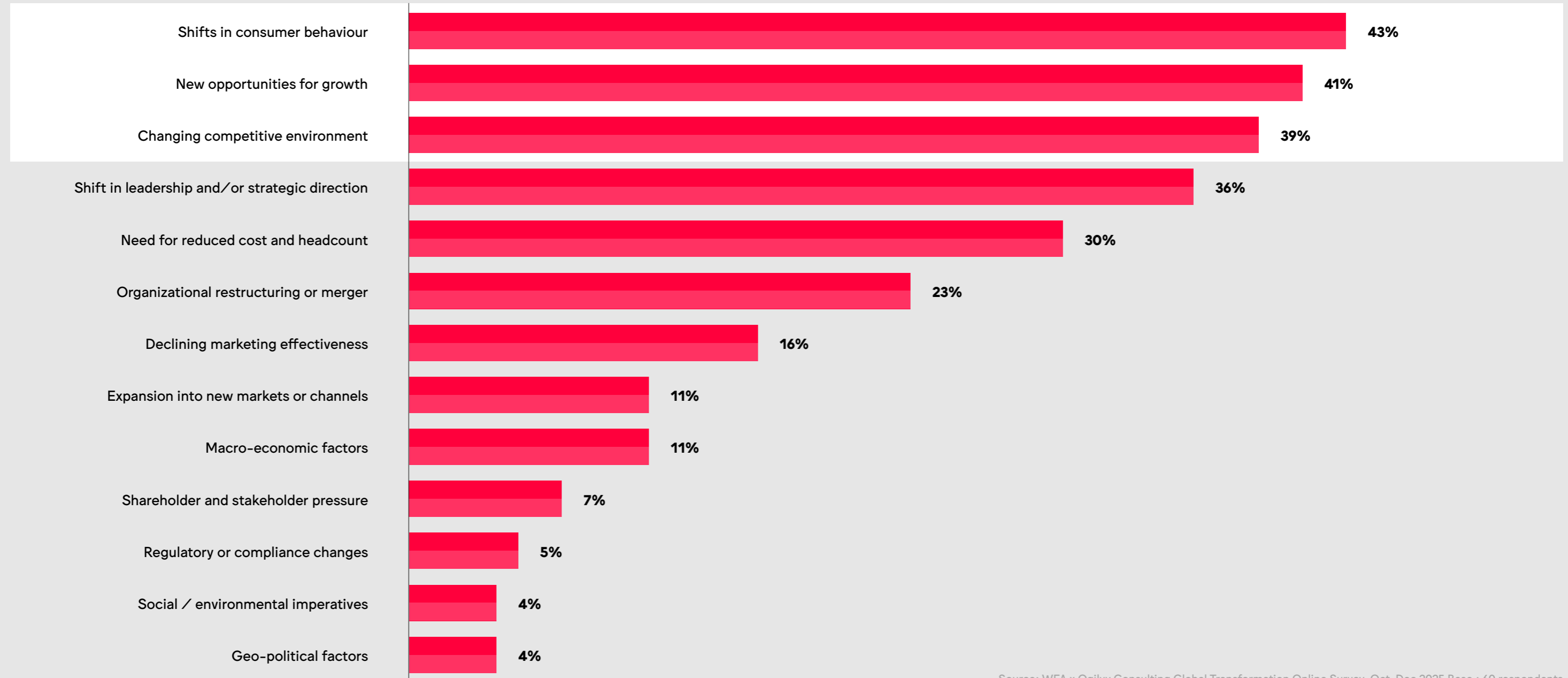


Asmita Dubey
Chief Digital & Marketing Officer
L'Oréal

Transformation driven by a changing landscape

Which of the following are the three main drivers for marketing transformation in your organization?

Select up to 3



Source: WFA x Ogilvy Consulting Global Transformation Online Survey, Oct-Dec 2025 Base : 60 respondents

Complex problems require diverse leadership styles

This relentless pressure and constant necessity for change truly is the mother of invention. What we discovered, however, is that “invention” can take many forms.

When we pressed CMOs on what triggers marketing transformation, the answers were diverse. Our survey results pointed to external shifts in consumer behaviors or new growth opportunities. Other results pointed to internal triggers, such as a change in leadership or a need for cost and headcount reduction.

In our interviews, several CMOs pointed squarely to technology: the promise of AI, the power of new data platforms, and the infrastructure for social commerce. A significant number of CMOs focused on people: addressing capability gaps, breaking down structural silos, or overcoming deep-seated cultural resistance.



Much of the conventional wisdom around transformation fails because it assumes a universal pathway, a one-size-fits-all blueprint. Our conversations revealed that leaders don't just execute transformations differently, they conceive them differently. They're shaped by deeply held beliefs about how organizations, markets, and people actually evolve.

This isn't a failure of leadership, it's a feature of it. The diversity in approach is a natural outcome of human leadership. Therefore, the question isn't whether to transform. It's not even about what to transform: it's about *recognizing how you instinctively approach transformation*, and whether that approach matches what your organization actually needs right now. This critical self-awareness paves the way for understanding the different archetypes of CMOs, which we will explore next.

“GenAI is about to shake the way we create the content. So many images... even videos now. And so, it changes the whole thing: the process, the power, the central versus local.”



Pierre-Yves Calloc'h
Global Chief Digital Officer
Pernod Ricard

The five core tensions every transformer must navigate

Tension 1: New technology vs. timeless fundamentals

Tension 2: Mindset vs. machine

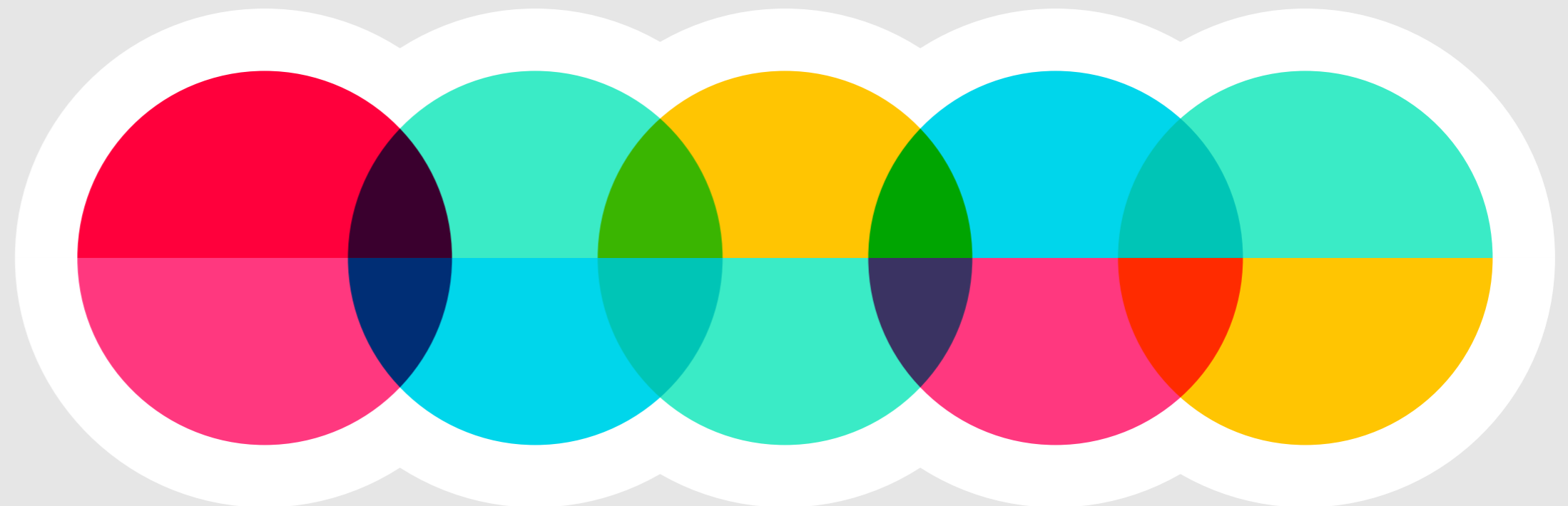
Tension 3: The expanding vs. precarious role of the CMO

Tension 4: Global scale vs. hyperlocal relevance

Tension 5: Transform to win vs. win without transforming

Leading marketing transformation isn't about following a map: it's about navigating a landscape of competing forces. There is no single playbook because success is not a destination, but a continuous act of balancing paradoxes. These aren't problems to be solved once, but persistent tensions to be managed.

From our conversations with the world's most successful marketing leaders, we've identified five core tensions that sit at the heart of any transformation. The ability to not just recognize but to resolve these tensions is what separates leaders who drive lasting change from those who merely manage projects.



Tension 1:

New technology vs. timeless fundamentals

Many once feared AI would sideline fundamentals. Instead, it's forced us to be clearer about brand narrative and earned presence. This creates a timing paradox: how do leaders invest in the fundamentals of today while responsibly betting on the technology of tomorrow, all without the "shiny object" syndrome derailing strategy?

Our survey findings reveal the timing paradox in action: while leaders rank AI as their #1 future priority, their focus today remains on brand building—a discipline they predict will fall dramatically in importance over the next five years.



Tension 1: New technology vs. timeless fundamentals

Navigating this is the tightrope that the modern CMO walks. AI holds up a mirror to the marketing function, forcing it to prove its fundamental value. As several of our qualitative interviews shared, the risk of getting lost in the novel and nascent is real and immediate, manifesting in three distinct fears:

1. **The fear of commoditization.** When the same tools are available to everyone, outputs start to look the same. Will marketing lose its edge as brands blur into a sea of sameness?
2. **The risk of activity without progress.** Global organizations are seeing change and transformation in different pockets, with competing

priorities and visions of success not always being aligned.

3. **The danger of falling in love with the tool.** Falling in love with a specific tool may lead us to forgetting the human reality, how people work together, and the need to focus on outcomes.

The great paradox, however, is that this technological pressure makes brand, purpose, and narrative *more* important, not less. In a world saturated with AI-generated content, a clear, authentic brand narrative becomes the most valuable asset you can own. Technology can't fix a weak or undefined brand, it will only amplify its flaws.

Brand building remains the timeless “why,” while technology is evolving the “how”.

Ultimately, the tension between fundamentals and technology is not a battle to be won, but a balance to be mastered. Successful leaders don't treat AI as a strategy in itself – they treat it as a powerful accelerator for a strategy they've already defined, one rooted in timeless fundamentals of brand and human connection. This clarity is what protects them from “shiny object syndrome” and allows them to build for tomorrow without sacrificing the brand of today.

“Beware falling in love with chatbots. Fall in love with human empathy – real human beings. The focus should not be on efficiency but on improvement.”



Conny Kalcher
Group Chief Customer Officer
Zurich Insurance Company



“Cadbury remains all about celebration and generosity, but AI and technology can help us deliver those timeless equities in a more personalized and more efficient way.”



Anuj Dahiya
Global Senior Director Agency Ecosystem
Mondelez



“AI will paradoxically reinforce marketing, because there is a need to be distinctive.”



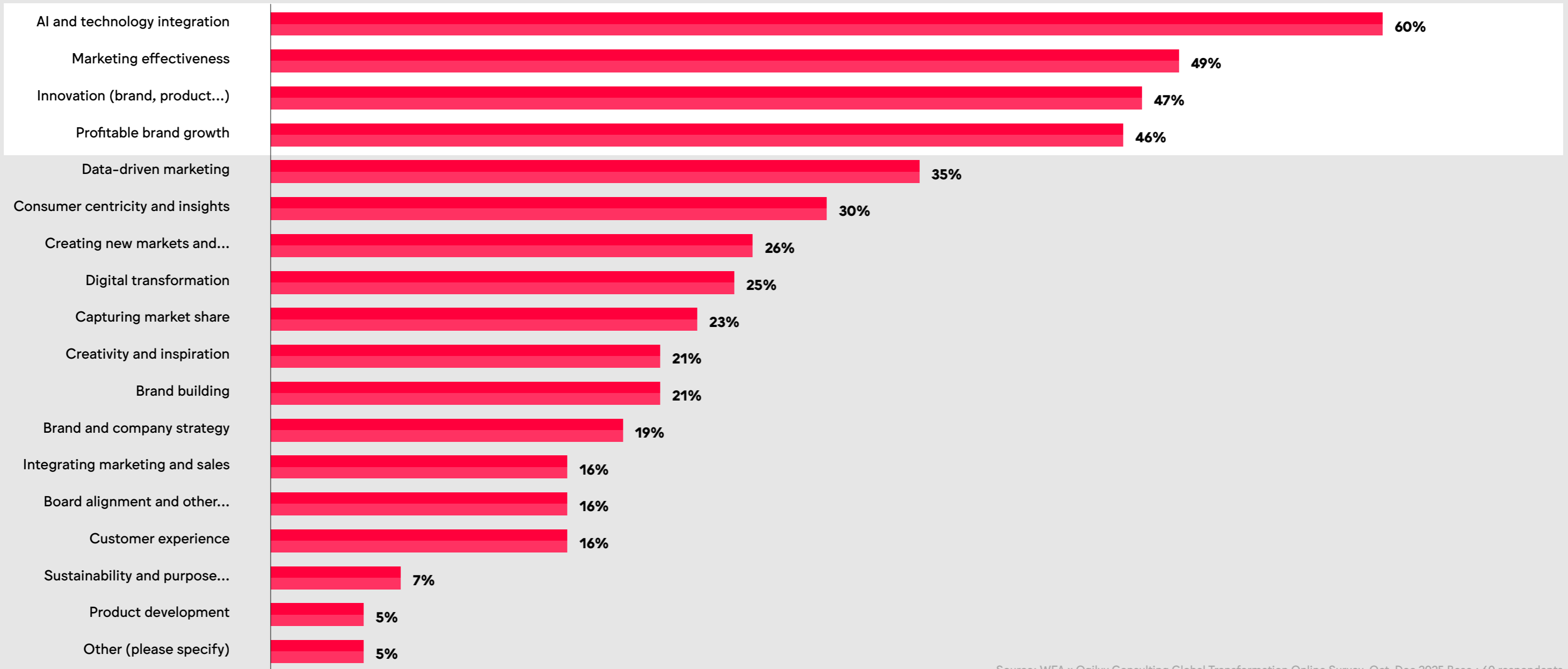
Jérôme Amouyal
Global Media & Marketing Effectiveness Director
AXA



Marketing leaders rank AI and technology as top priority 5 years from now

Q: Which of the following, if any, are the top priorities for your marketing leadership today?

Select up to 5



Source: WFA x Ogilvy Consulting Global Transformation Online Survey, Oct-Dec 2025 Base : 60 respondents

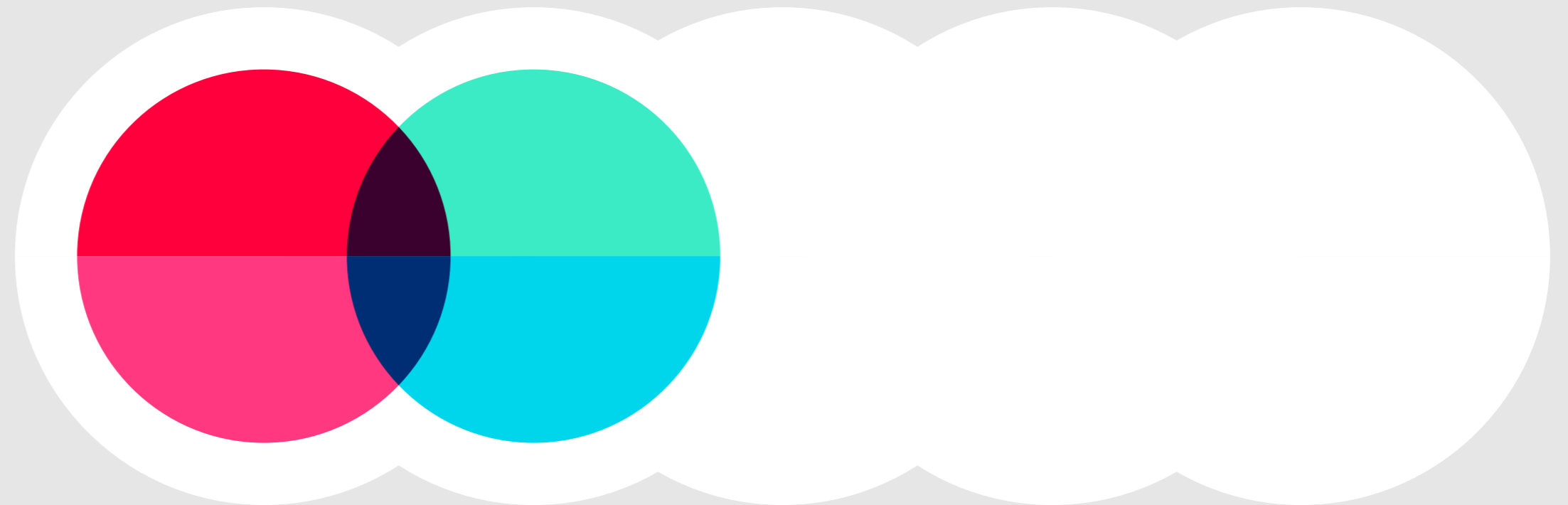
Tension 2:

Mindset vs. machine

Transformation starts with mindset, but it only scales through systems. The core paradox is this: How do we build the “machine” without crushing the agility and human-centeredness that makes transformation possible in the first place?

This insight reveals two paths to failure. A mindset without systems can lead to passionate burnout and “random acts of transformation” that never scale. Systems without a mindset can lead to a soulless bureaucracy and “zombie-like adoption of process without purpose.”

The key is to reframe what the “machine” is. It’s not about control: it’s about enabling human-centered work to flourish by creating clarity and removing friction. The system is how you make the vision a tangible blueprint for success, through clear ownership and KPIs.



Tension 2: Mindset vs. machine

But *building* the machine is as important as *defining* it. Our research shows that effective, human-centric systems are not designed in a vacuum: they are co-created with the teams that use them. They share three core attributes:

1. **They are designed for simplicity, not complexity.** An effective system frees up capacity; it doesn't create bureaucratic burden.
2. **They are guardrails, not cages.** The system's job is to ensure strategic alignment (the global guardrails), which in turn gives local, agile teams the freedom to be creative and relevant.

3. **They are built to learn and adapt, not just do.** An agile machine must itself be agile. It requires feedback loops to measure what's working and then adapt.

When the machine is built this way, the paradox resolves. The system no longer competes with the mindset, it becomes the engine that powers it.

“If you have the process and you don't have the mindset, you are going to perpetuate status quo. If you have the mindset and you don't have the process, you're gonna get frustrated very, very fast.”



Antonio Lucio
Executive Vice President
Chief Marketing & Corporate Affairs Officer
HP Inc



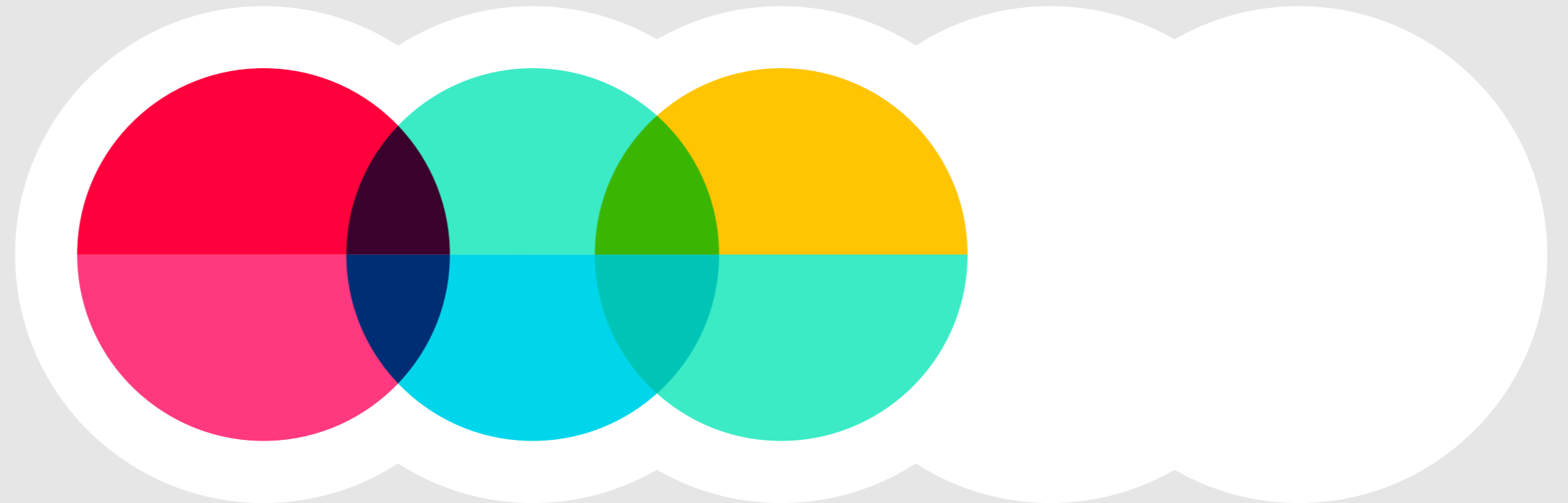
Jonathan Halvorson
Chief Digital & Marketing Officer
Kenvue

Tension 3:

The expanding vs. precarious role of the CMO

The CMO is now the designated “orchestrator” responsible for connecting marketing to the entire enterprise. Our research reveals a paradox: as the role’s success becomes increasingly dependent on the functions that marketers influence but don’t control, how do they drive impact without becoming the scapegoat for organizational failures?

There’s no question that the modern CMO has a broad, cross-functional mandate. The lines are blurring across the business. This extends far beyond Sales: success for the CMO requires connecting with Technology, R&D, finance and the entire business, all in service of driving enterprise value and growth.



Tension 3: The expanding vs. precarious role of the CMO

Herein lies the paradox. While the *mandate* is expanding, our research shows that the most successful CMOs often have *narrower* formal control. They are resolving this tension by mastering a new kind of leadership, proving that success isn't about the size of your org chart, but the depth of your influence.

This model of influence isn't about control, but about inspiration. It's a shift from directing to guiding. Mastering the art of influence is done in three ways, according to our interviewees:

1. Speak the language of value. You don't earn a seat at the table by talking about marketing. The seat is earned by talking about enterprise value in the language of the CFO and CIO.

2. Co-create the shared vision. Influence begins with inclusion. A successful orchestrator doesn't hand down a marketing plan: they facilitate a process where Sales, Tech, and R&D see themselves *in* the plan.

3. Force strategic focus. A narrow scope allows for deep impact. A leader's influence is wasted if spread too thin.

The paradox is resolved when we understand that the most powerful CMOs aren't the ones with the biggest teams, but the ones with the clearest vision and the deepest cross-functional credibility. Their impact is measured not by the functions they control, but by the enterprise-wide growth they orchestrate. By mastering influence over ownership, they maximize their impact while minimizing their risk of becoming the scapegoat.

“Great CMOs impact the organization and enterprise level regardless of the responsibility... They don't need to own it to be able to impact the enterprise.”



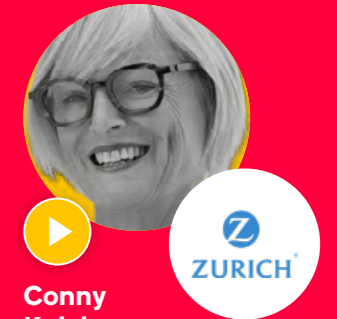
Jonathan Halvorson
Chief Digital & Marketing Officer
Kenvue

“Our role is to inspire, to support, to bring tension, and to agitate and bring change to what the people in the business units are doing.”



Rafael Fernández de Alarcón
Director of Sponsorship, Media & Brand
Telefónica

“Beware falling in love with chatbots. Fall in love with human empathy – real human beings. The focus should not be on efficiency only, but on customer experience improvement.”

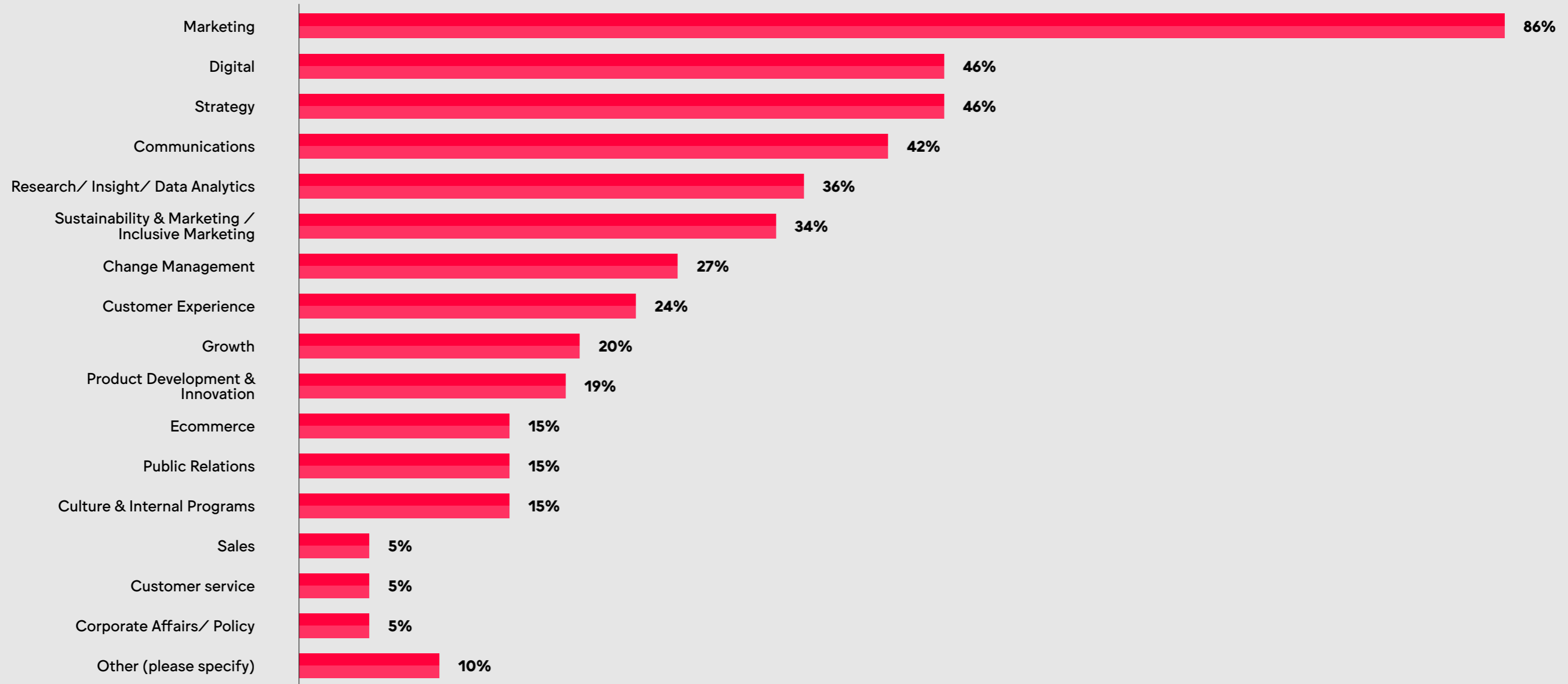


Conny Kalcher
Group Chief Customer Officer
Zurich Insurance Company

On average, marketing leaders are responsible for leading over 4 functions

Q: In your current role, which of the following business functions sit under your area of responsibility?

Select all that apply



Source: WFA x Ogilvy Consulting Global Transformation Online Survey, Oct-Dec 2025 Base : 60 respondents

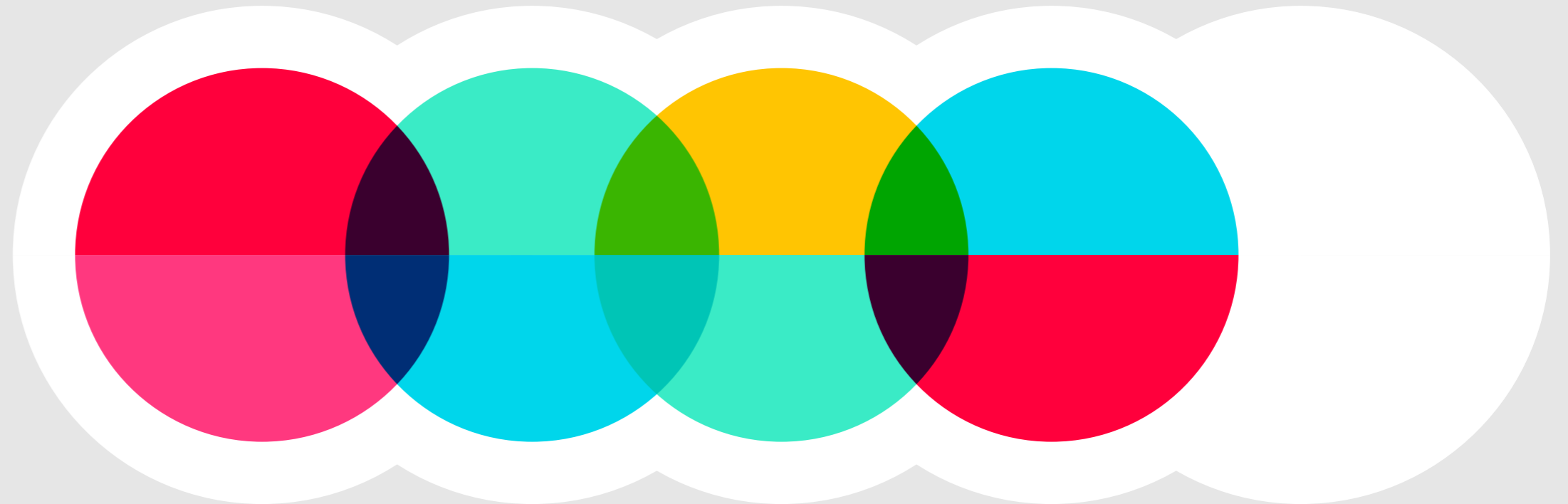
Tension 4:

Global scale vs. hyperlocal relevance

Technology globalizes while culture fragments. Regional structures were believed to bridge this gap, but as our data suggests, many feel they can become a strategic compromise.

Our survey reveals a tale of two strategies: today's leaders are winning with a regional focus, but tomorrow's enterprises are betting on a future that is less regional and more globally enabled hyperlocal.

For decades, the choice was a binary: a standardized global model for efficiency, or a decentralized local model for relevance. The "regional model" emerged as the go-to compromise. Today, that model is being squeezed between two opposing forces. From above, technology,



Tension 4: Global scale vs. hyperlocal relevance

data, and AI demand a global scale to be efficient. From below, culture has never been more fragmented.

This pressure is forcing the emergence of a new model: not a compromise, but a synthesis called the “**globally-enabled hyperlocal model.**” One WFA member summed it up simply: ‘global story, local glory.’”

This new model has two core components:

1. Global Enabling Platforms Instead of top-down command centers, leading companies are building centralized “centers of excellence” that provide the tools and guardrails for everyone. Their job is not to dictate execution, but to create scale and consistency where it matters most—in brand identity, technology, and data.

2. Empowered Hyperlocal Teams With the global platforms providing the «what» (such as brand identity, tools), local teams are free to become true masters of the “how” (such as cultural execution). They are no longer just adapting regional plans;

they are originating ideas from the ground up, empowered with a deep, personal understanding of their customers.

Many leaders, therefore, are no longer optimizing their regional structures. They are planning their obsolescence. They are reallocating resources from regional management layers to build global enabling platforms that get them closer to their (local) customers than ever before. This requires courage, as it challenges decades of organizational design. The question for leaders is no longer “How do we fix our region?” but “How do we use global technology to finally master being both big and small at the same time?”

“I actually think it’s dangerous to talk about a global-to-local cascade. To me, that’s the old world. And even the idea of global-- think global, act local-- I think is outdated for this new world. I think local wins hearts and global wins business. Ideas can be born locally AND then travel and iterated globally for resonance and scale.”



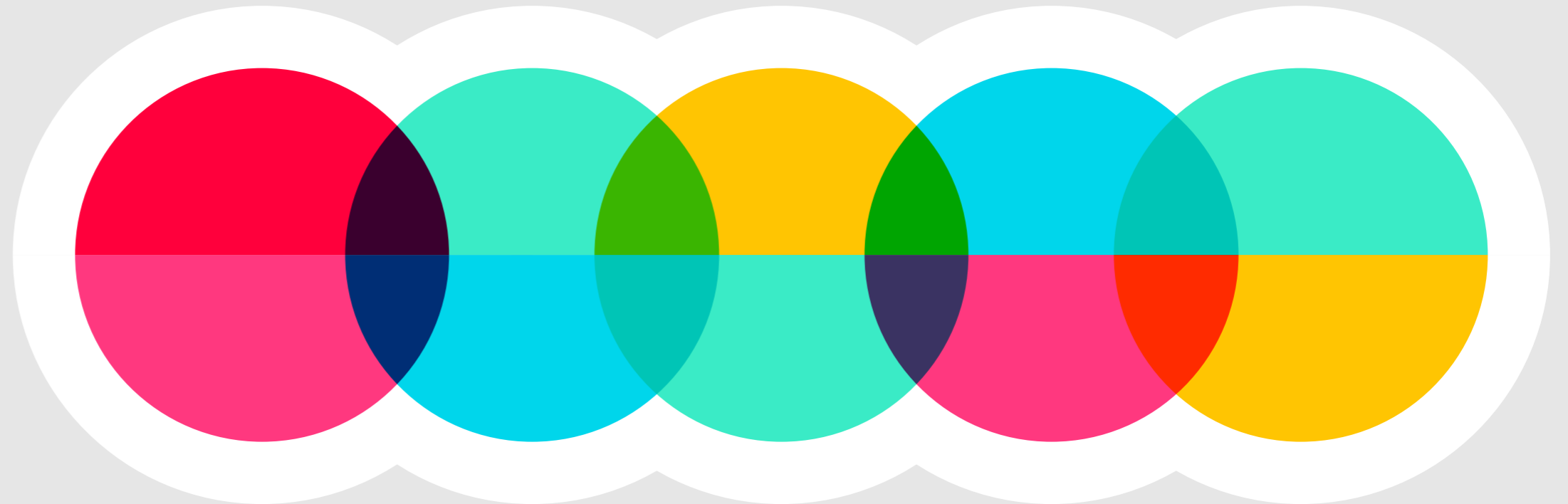
Esi Eggleston Bracey
Former Chief Growth & Marketing Officer
Unilever

Tension 5:

Transform to win vs. win without transforming

The modern business mantra is one of permanent revolution. Many organizations believe they are in *permanent transformation*. The market is accelerating, and the constant flux of consumer behavior and technology seems to demand **constant adaptation**. This has led to a culture of «transformation theater,” a series of high-stakes, reactive reinventions that risk exhausting teams and muddying strategy.

And yet, our research reveals a surprising truth: the leaders who feel their marketing is strongest are those that transform the least. Instead, they are operating from a stable, deeply held philosophy.



Tension 5: Transform to win vs. win without transforming

Our findings reveal the paradox of transformation: the strongest marketing leaders transform the least. They are less likely to reinvent their operating models or culture, relying instead on a consistent philosophy to evolve.

This consistent core acts as an anchor in a chaotic market. A strong philosophy provides the clarity for marketers to consistently do their jobs, while the market changes around them.

This doesn't mean standing still; it means that for these leaders, change

is a disciplined **evolution, not a chaotic reinvention**. For them, the fundamentals are **not under discussion or challenge**. Their evolution is guided by two key principles:

It operates in deliberate cycles, not panic responses. Strong leaders build adaptation into their rhythm without abandoning the core mission.

It's triggered by opportunity, not just disruption. While others are reacting to threats, the strongest leaders are proactively seeking growth. The impetus for change is **opportunity and problem**

first. This is what separates strategic evolution from reactive survival.

The paradox is resolved when we redefine what "transformation" truly means for a successful organization. For the most effective leaders, transformation is a series of disciplined evolutions that extend from a stable philosophical core. Their North Star remains fixed, and that's precisely what makes them better at navigating change. The ultimate goal is a permanent state of purposeful evolution.

"We have real clarity on the things that we need to do and what milestones we want to achieve through really detailed scorecards"



Jill Cress
Chief Marketing Officer
Babylist



Leadership in times of transformation

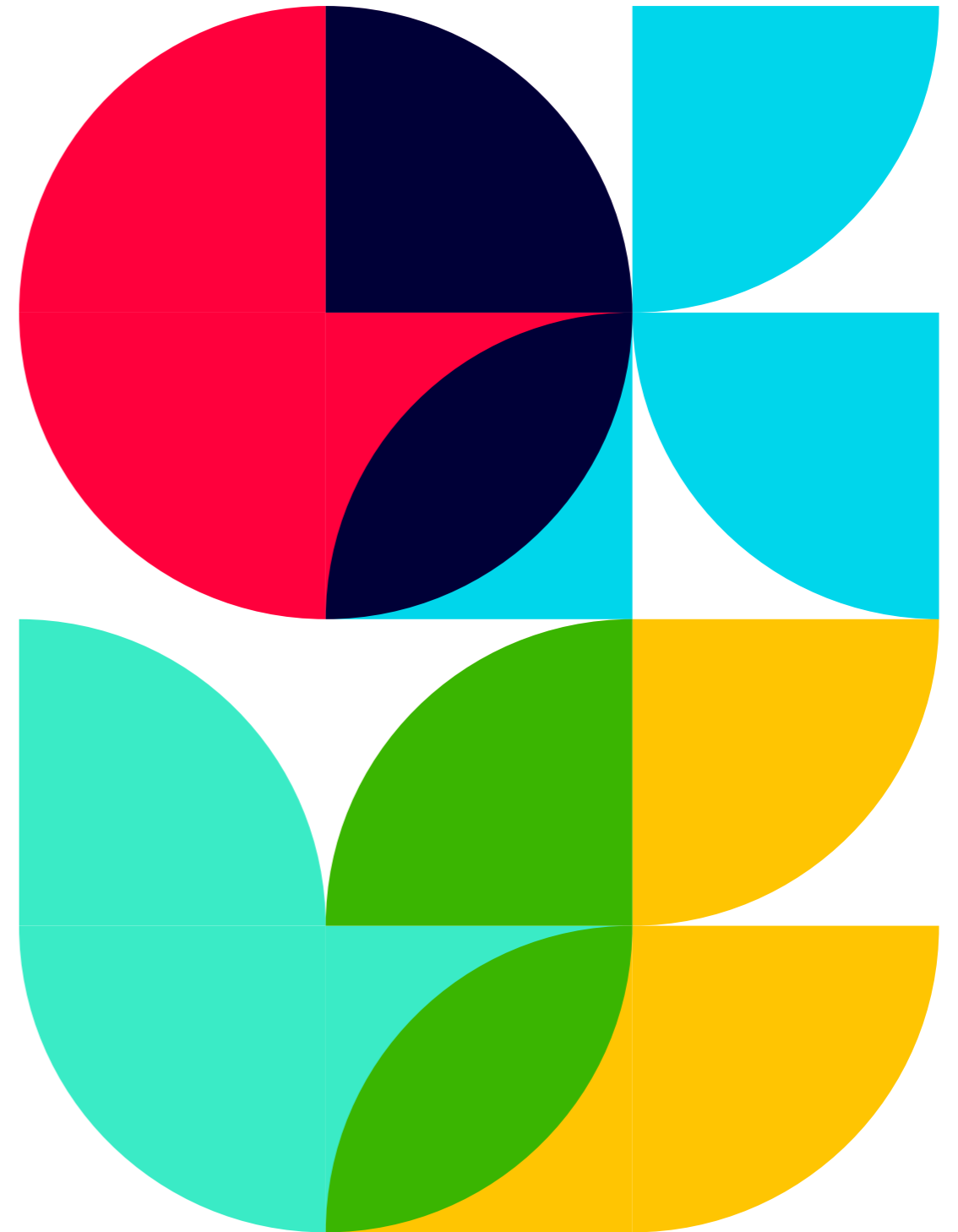
Leadership in times of transformation

These five tensions—Mindset vs. Machine, Technology vs. Fundamentals, Influence vs. Control, Global vs. Local, and Transforming to win vs. Winning Without Transforming—are not abstract thought experiments. They are the daily reality for every marketing leader. Navigating them is work, but our research revealed a critical insight: there is no single ‘right’ way to resolve them. Instead, we found that many of the world’s most successful leaders adopt distinct approaches based on their own leadership styles, priorities, and organizational context. They don’t follow a universal playbook; they follow a personal compass.

This has led us to identify four fundamental archetypes of transformation leaders.

While the five core tensions of transformation are universal, the solutions are not. Our research aimed to understand how different leaders interpret, prioritize, and operationalize their response to these challenges. We found that their approaches consistently fall into one of four fundamental archetypes, each representing a distinct pathway to mobilizing change.

These pathways can be mapped across two key dimensions: whether a leader is more **Vision-Led vs. Execution-Led**, and whether they favor **Structured Systems vs. Emergent Agility**. Understanding your own dominant archetype—and its inherent blind spots—is the first step toward building a team capable of navigating the multifaceted complexities of modern transformation.



Identify your archetype

Identify the archetype you *recognize* in yourself, not the one you wish you were. Your dominant archetype is your greatest strength *and* your most significant gap. The goal is not to overcome it, but to understand it. From there, you can then identify which archetypes you most critically need beside you, and ask honestly whether your current team covers those gaps or not.

STRUCTURE

Emphasizes clear frameworks, processes, and defined pathways

VISION-LED

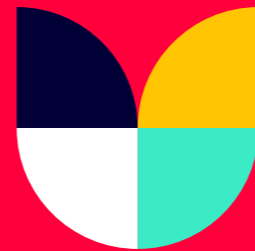
Focuses on direction, purpose, and people engagement



The Strategic Visionary



The Culture Catalyst



The Capability Builder



The Adaptive Navigator

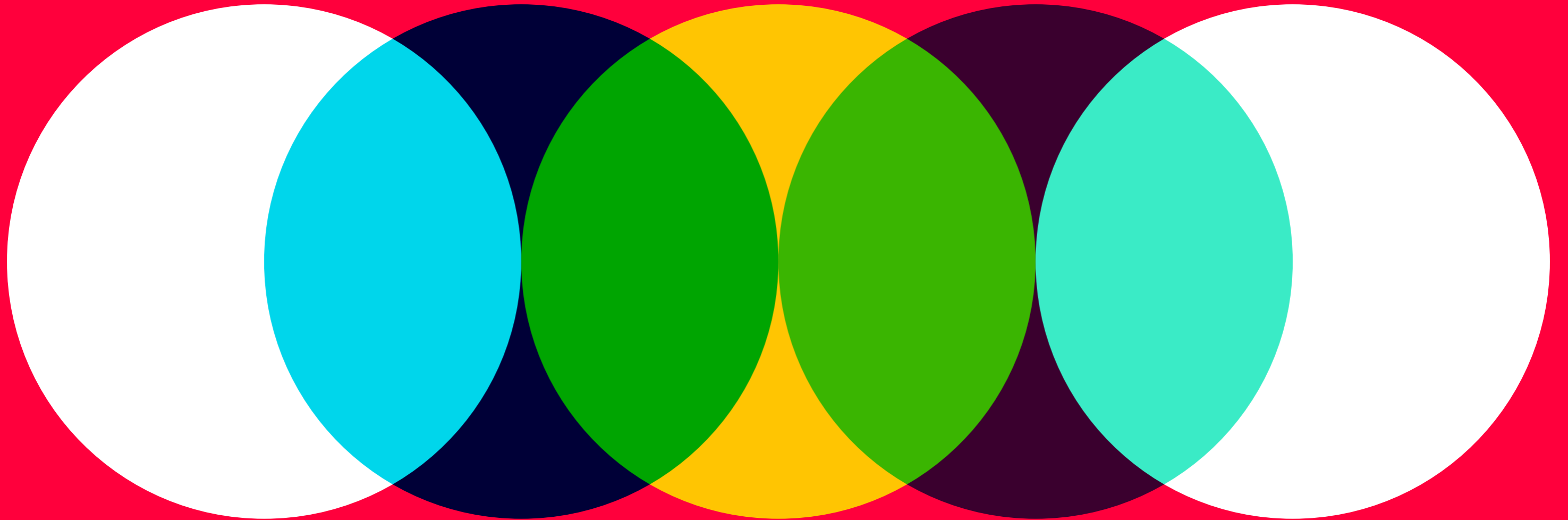
EXECUTION-LED

Emphasizes systems, capabilities, and operational excellence

AGILITY

Prioritizes adaptability, responsiveness, and iterative approaches

1. The strategic visionary



The strategic visionary

Primary Focus: Leading transformation through clear brand philosophy and business strategy

Characteristics: Long-term strategic focus, clear direction, growth philosophy

Operating at 30,000 feet, the Strategic Visionary believes that a clear, compelling vision is the essential gravitational force for an organization. Their mantra is “strategy before tools,” insisting that knowing the “what” and “why” is the only way to prevent wasted motion and align the enterprise. They provide clarity, a unifying narrative, and a framework for principled decision-making, acting as the organization’s North Star.

The potential weakness of the Visionary lies in the gap between their grand vision and the messy reality of execution. They can grow impatient with detailed processes and risk abstraction if the vision isn’t translated into tangible, actionable steps for the rest of the organization.



How You Think

1. Your first instinct in any challenge is to zoom out — you want the full landscape before making any moves.
2. You think in narratives and metaphors, naturally reframing problems before others have realised they’re solving the wrong one.
3. You are most comfortable with a two-to-five-year horizon, even when the business demands quarterly results.



What You Say

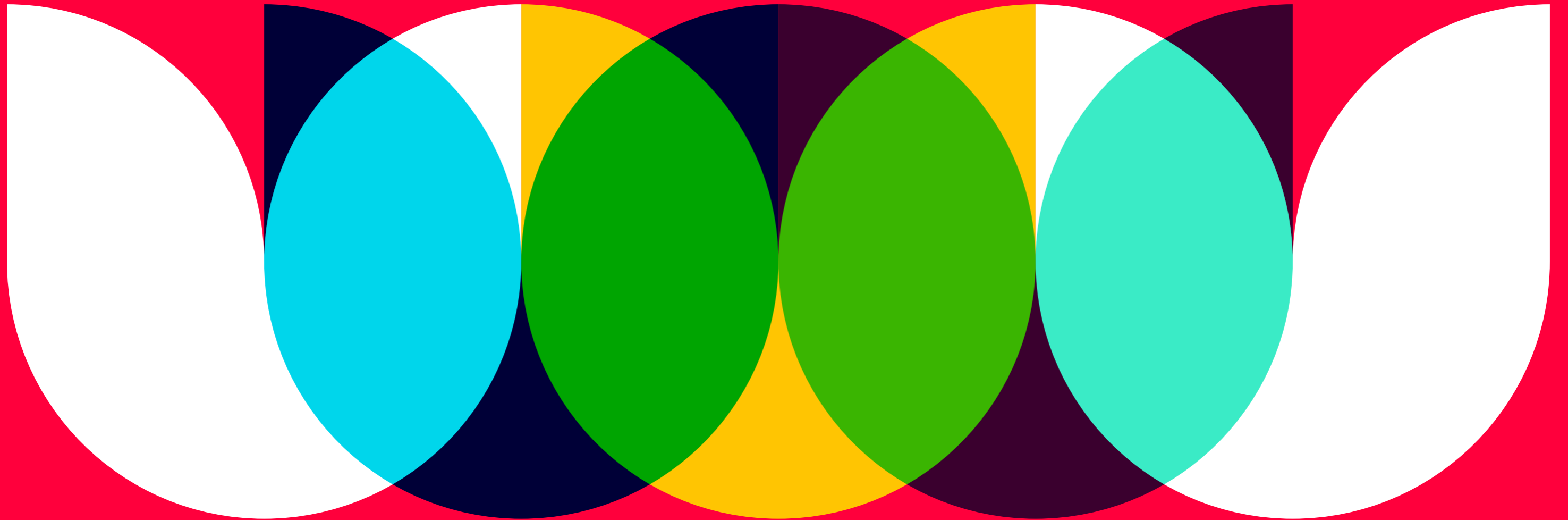
1. *“Before we discuss the ‘how,’ we need to settle on the ‘why.’”*
2. *“We’re solving the symptom, not the problem. What’s the real problem here?”*
3. *“If we can’t explain this simply, we don’t understand it well enough yet.”*



When You’re Over-Indexing

1. Your team finds your vision inspiring but difficult to translate into action — they understand the destination but don’t have the directions to get there.
2. The vision keeps evolving before execution has had a chance to catch up.
3. Your best strategic thinking lives in decks that are admired but not fully operationalized.

2. The capability builder



The capability builder

Primary Focus: Transforming mindsets and building organizational capability through people

Characteristics: Methodical implementation, building skills and infrastructure

If the Visionary is the “why,” the Capability Builder is the pragmatic master of the “how.” This leader excels at operational excellence, methodically identifying strategic gaps, and building the infrastructure—the systems, processes, and skills—to make the vision a reality. They focus intently on ensuring that the marketing machine is a well-oiled engine, prioritizing measurement and fundamentals to build a strong, scalable foundation.

The risk for the Builder is rigidity. In their pursuit of a perfect process, they can be slow to adapt to market shifts or undervalue the human element of change, potentially building a “highway to nowhere” if the initial strategy is flawed.



How You Think

1. Every challenge triggers a gap analysis — what capability, process, or system is missing?
2. If something cannot be measured and tracked, you won't rest until it can be.
3. You find genuine satisfaction in building things that outlast you — scalable systems, repeatable frameworks, or institutional knowledge.



What You Say

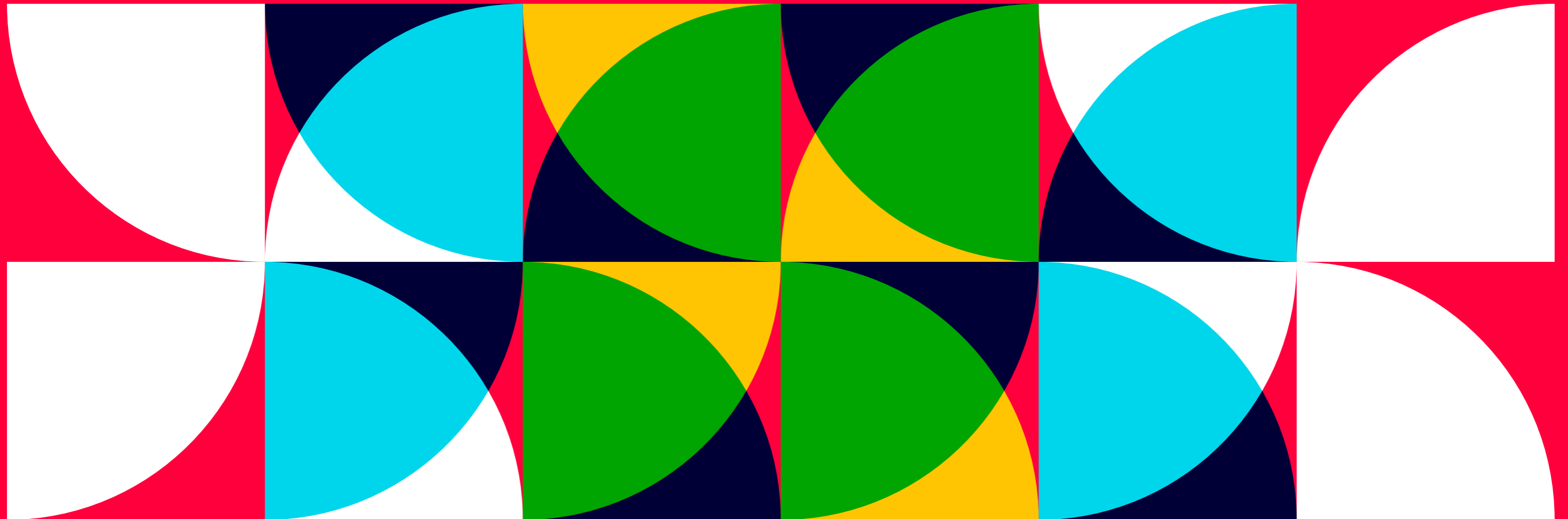
1. *“That’s a great ambition — now let’s build the infrastructure to make it real.”*
2. *“Who owns this? What does success look like? What’s the timeline?”*
3. *“Show me the scorecard. If it’s not tracked, it’s not a real priority.”*



When You’re Over-Indexing

1. Your organization has beautifully documented processes that work well in some markets and meet quiet resistance in others.
2. You defend existing systems longer than you should because dismantling them feels personal.
3. People describe your transformation work as *“a highway to the right destination, built slightly too late.”*

3. The culture catalyst



The culture catalyst

Primary Focus: Systematically developing specific capabilities and infrastructure required for future success

Characteristics: People-centered, mindset shifts, organizational dynamics

The Culture Catalyst leads with a simple belief: transformation is a people-first endeavor. They understand that even the most brilliant strategies and systems will fail if people are not engaged, empowered, and brought along on the journey. Their primary focus is on change management, talent development, and navigating the complex human dynamics that can make or break any initiative.

This archetype generates powerful organizational buy-in and momentum.

However, the Catalyst can struggle to connect their “soft” metrics of cultural health to hard business outcomes. Without a strong strategic North Star or a systematic way to scale their influence, their efforts risk creating a positive but ultimately unfocused culture.



How You Think

1. You walk into any organization and immediately read the room — the energy, the unspoken dynamics, and those who have quietly checked out.
2. You believe no strategy survives contact with a disengaged culture, and you’ve got the scars to prove it.
3. You are at your best in moments of tension and change, where your ability to bring people together is most visibly valuable.



What You Say

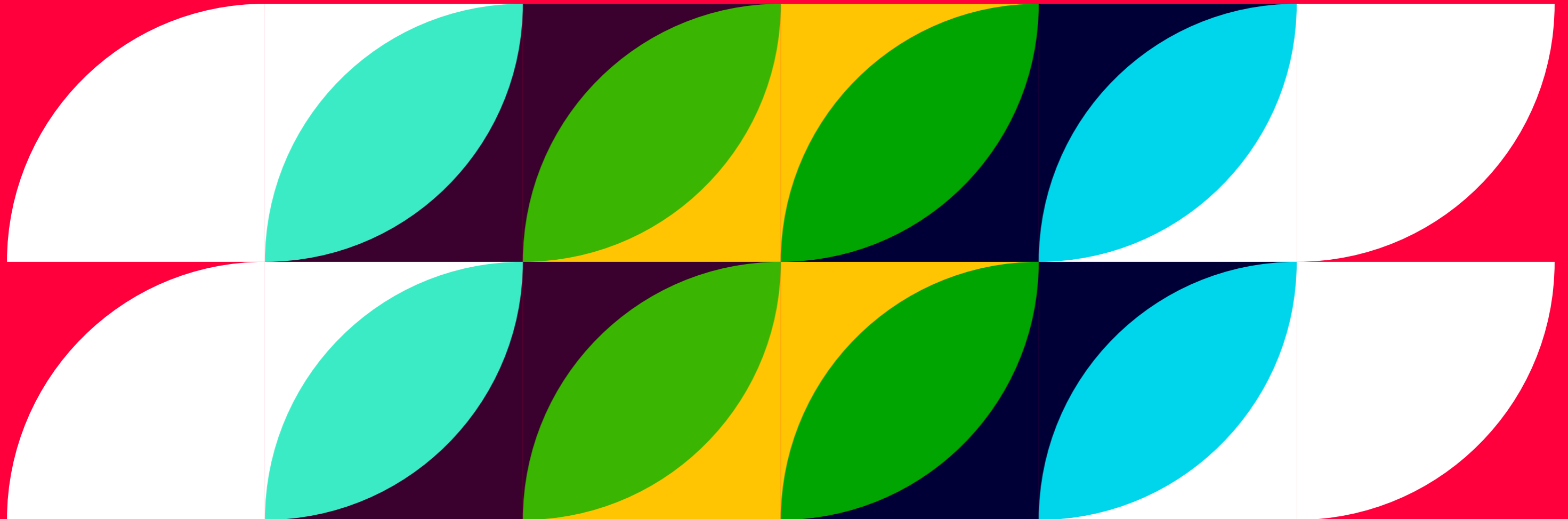
1. *“I already know which two people will make or break this — and neither of them are in this room.”*
2. *“I want to hear from the people who will actually be doing this work.”*
3. *“If people feel this is being done to them rather than with them, we’ve already lost.”*



When You’re Over-Indexing

1. The boardroom perceives you as a “soft skills” leader whose impact is difficult to quantify.
2. Your transformation efforts generate tremendous energy and goodwill that doesn’t consistently translate into business outcomes.
3. You create organizations that are highly engaged — committed, but not always to the same direction.

4. The adaptive navigator



The adaptive navigator

Primary Focus: Creating responsive systems that continuously evolve in a rapidly changing market

Characteristics: Continuous evolution, responsive systems, iterative learning

Thriving in dynamic environments, the Adaptive Navigator embraces continuous, iterative learning. They believe that in a constantly changing market, the only winning strategy is one of relentless agility. They prioritize speed and direction, building responsive systems that can quickly pivot based on new data and market signals. They are masters of the test-and-learn approach, adeptly balancing automation with human insight.

The Navigator's strength is also their potential weakness. Their constant pursuit of the new can lead to "change fatigue" within the organization. By chasing every emerging trend, they risk strategic incoherence and may struggle to implement the long-term foundational projects necessary for sustainable growth.



How You Think

1. You are always scanning the periphery for new data, emerging signals, and shifting behaviors, and you are most energised when others are most unsettled.
2. Your instinct is always to run a fast experiment rather than build a perfect plan, because you trust evidence over assumptions.
3. You think in iterative cycles. Feedback loops, sprints, and hackathons, rather than linear roadmaps.



What You Say

1. *"Let's test it quickly and see what the data tells us — we can optimise from there."*
2. *"I'd rather be roughly right and moving forward than precisely right and standing still."*
3. *"Don't wait for the perfect plan. We'll learn more in the first week of doing it than in another month of planning it."*



When You're Over-Indexing

1. Your team has a graveyard of promising pilots that were never scaled before the next pivot arrived. A condition some call "pilot-itis."
2. Your agility is experienced by other functions as a moving target, making cross-functional plans feel like they're written in pencil.
3. Your organization has become very good at responding to the market but has lost the habit of shaping it.

The power of complementary leadership

After identifying these pathways, a natural question arises: which archetype is best?

The answer is **none of them. And all of them.**

The most critical insight from our research is that **your dominant leadership archetype is simultaneously your greatest strength and your most significant vulnerability.** It is the lens through which you view the world, the tool you reach for first, and the area where you deliver the most value. But it is also the area where you are most likely to over-index, creating predictable points of failure if left unbalanced.

No single leader, regardless of their talent, can resolve this tension alone. The pressure of modern transformation is too multifaceted.

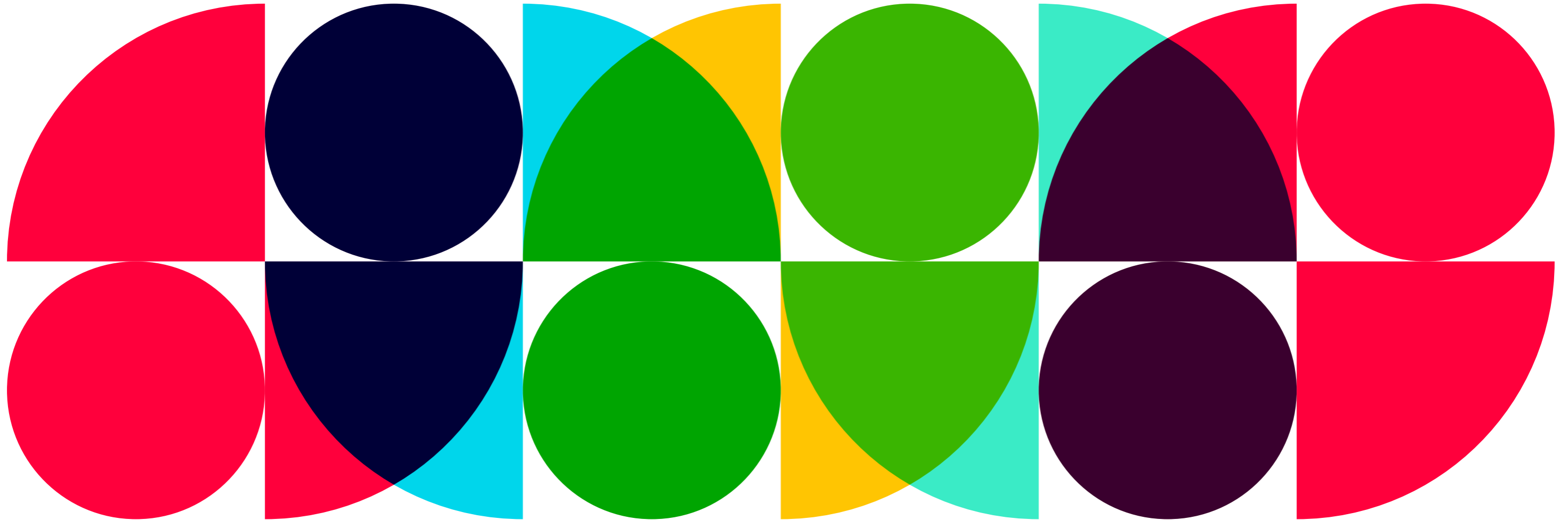


This is why the ultimate act of leadership is not to master all four archetypes, but to have the profound self-awareness to know your own, and to deliberately build a leadership team that covers your blind spots.

Success is about architecting a **complementary team** that embodies the resolution to all kinds of tension. A Strategic Visionary needs a Capability Builder to translate their vision into a concrete plan. A Culture Catalyst needs a Visionary to provide a clear North Star. An Adaptive Navigator needs a Builder to ensure their agile sprints connect to a stable foundation.

The journey of transformation, therefore, begins with a simple question: **“Which one am I?”** Your answer is the key to understanding not only what you bring to the table, but, more importantly, who you need sitting there beside you.

Conclusion: The art of managing paradox



As we've seen, **the leaders who win transform the least.** It's not because they resist change, but because they have stopped confusing *activity* with *progress*, *reinvention* with *evolution*, and *exhaustion* with *ambition*. They have mastered something no roadmap can teach: the discipline of knowing themselves well enough to lead others through anything. This is what our research ultimately revealed. Not a better process. Not a smarter technology stack. Not a more elegant operating model.

A mirror.

Marketing transformation is a continuous, dynamic act of holding five fundamental tensions in productive balance; not a project, a strategy to execute, or a destination to reach. These tensions

never resolve permanently. They are the work. And the leaders who navigate them most successfully are the ones who have found themselves — who understand, with clarity and without ego, exactly how they instinctively lead, where that instinct creates value, and where it creates blind spots.

So, as you leave this research, we ask you to resist the instinct to ask, “*What should I transform?*” Ask instead: “*Who am I as a leader — and is that who my organization needs right now?*” Then ask the harder question: “*Who is missing from the table beside me?*”

The leaders who answer those questions honestly — and act on what they find — will not spend their careers chasing transformation.

They will be the ones defining it.



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WFA champions more effective, efficient and responsible marketing communications which help WFA members drive brand growth. It is the voice of marketers worldwide, representing more than 150 of the world's biggest brand owners and national advertiser associations in over 60 markets, which speak for tens of thousands of brands at a local level. Through WFA, they form a global network that offers marketers a unique source of leadership, expertise and inspiration.

If you would like to engage with WFA's CMO Forum, please contact:

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