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Semiotics and Design Thinking: a Foresight Approach for Building Cohesive, Resilient Brand Ecosystems

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Why the Future of Brand?





Modern Challenges

- world with profound challenges / opportunities
- accelerated pace of change
- multi-faceted phenomena – including a series of complex, seemingly “inter-woven” formative elements
- not merely directed by the movements of the marketplace
- increasingly comprising the very fabric of modern life



Why Brand?

- concept of “Brand” as an intervention point for building global sustainability— broad systemic impacts
- re-contextualizing Brand as an instrument of positive change—an active component in building a rich, sustainable world
- we define sustainability as a process where the activity of modern life is balanced with the transformational possibilities and resilient capacities of the social and natural ecosystems—and where neither of them becomes exhausted or less diverse
- Brands continue to thrive and remain profitable



Definition of 'Brand'

“We consider ‘Brand’ as a generic ‘container of identity’ structured around common purpose—whether of organizations, cultural movements, governments, social programmes or any activity involving the coordination of multiple parties and entities, be they individuals, Brands or other types of organizations.”



Research Question

“How might Brands be successful and relevant – while enacting positive impacts on creating a socially and environmentally sustainable future?”











Trends

100 μm



Trends Scanning.....

- 32 Trends identified
- 11 Trends: 7 'Drivers' + 4 'substantively influential'
- 8 selected as 'key highlights'

Formative Trends and Drivers	Change	3 rd Horizon Transformation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consumer Expectations of Environmental Sustainability 2. The End of Economic Certainty 3. The Global Threat to Environmental Sustainability 4. Operationalizing Biological Metaphors 5. Democratization of Science of Complexity / Uncertainty 6. Over-Informed Customers 7. Inter-Linked Economies in Maturing Globalization 8. Deepening Globalization 9. Permeation of Collaborative and Awareness Tools 10. The Rise of Women 11. The Growth of Urban Centers 	          	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2'. New Dynamic Stability 3'. Environmental Opportunity 6'. Continuous Co-Creation 8'. Global Hyperlocal 9'. Ambient Social Technology 10'. Rise of Permeable Leadership 11'. Shared Action Hubs

Trend: The End of Economic Certainty

Trend type: economic & political

Trend Summary: The economic landscape is constantly changing, at a seemingly accelerated rate – making it challenging for brands and organizations to adapt, and understand their effective role within it.

Trend Description: The rate of change within economic ecosystems is sufficiently high that it has an effect on brands and organizations – and their ability to effectively operate. This affects brands' sustainability and resiliency.

Signals:

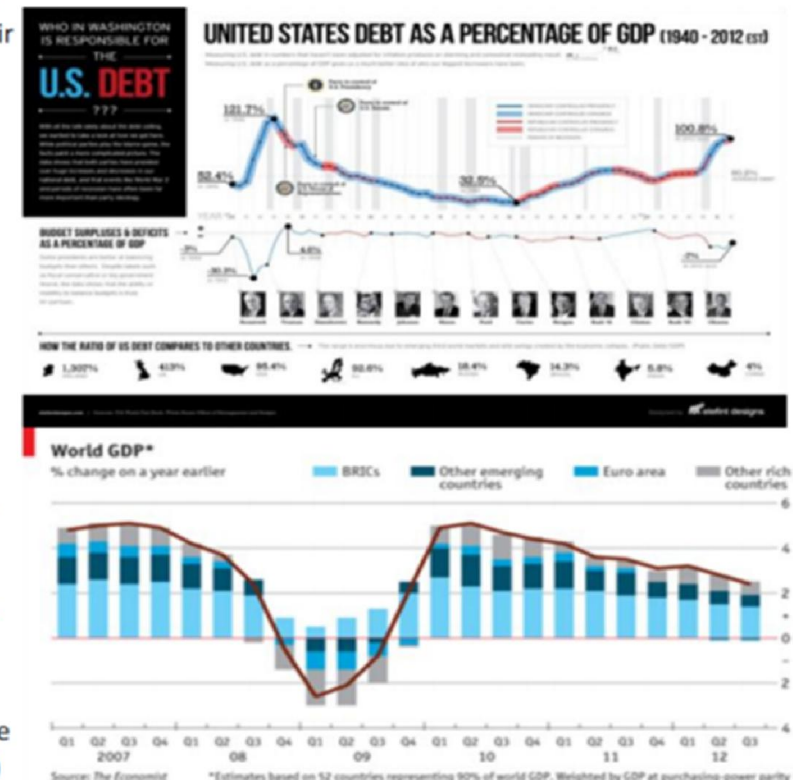
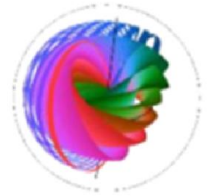
- Rampant globalization and economic indeterminacy (Arthur, 1994)
- Emerging global middle class (OECD 2010, McKinsey Quarterly 2006)
- Need to improve corporate fitness (Clippinger, 1999)
- Urge to "transform their enterprises into self-renewing, self-organizing systems that are maximally responsive to changing market conditions and opportunities."
- It is becoming increasingly important for organizations to gain competitive advantage by being able to manage and survive change.

Implications: Brands and organizations are pressured to increasingly adapt to uncertainty – changing internal structures towards distributed risk and innovation.

Resources: "Introduction: Rethinking Innovation in a Changing World" (Brown, 1997), "The Coevolution of New Organizational Forms" (Lewin, Long, 1999), Levinthal & Warglien (1999)

Extrapolation: 10 and 25-years out, economic ecosystems are progressively getting more complex and unpredictable – with emergent fluidity dominating.

Counter Trends: Return to Grass-Roots Economies (Barter, Personal Exchange Networks, Trust as Currency)





Trend: Threat to Environmental Sustainability

Trend type: environmental & political

Trend Summary: The continuing evidence of global climate change and environmental degradation questions long-term sustainability of our consumptive behaviours, economics & engagement models.

Trend Description: The complexities of enacting global sustainability emerges distinct new 'brand-consumer-environment' cooperation and interaction models – creating new ecosystems of value that offer a distinct advantage of continuous adaptation, while creating new areas of opportunity for brands, consumers and environment (new triple P).

Signals:

- Consumer environmental sustainability expectations – Sustainable Food Consumption (Vermeir, Verbeke, 2006), Community Economics (Daly, Cobb, Cobb, 1994)
- Global recognition of sustainability as a key economic influencer (World Bank, Goodland, 1995), Environmental Economics (Turner, Pearce, Bateman, 1994)
- Emerging new sustainability-based models for resilience – Social and Ecological Systems (Berkes, Folke, Colding, 2000), Panarchy (Gunderson, 2001)
- Sustainable consumption – World Economic Forum: More with Less (WEF, 2012), Sustainability Champions (WEF, 2013), Tomorrow's Consumer (WEF, 2013)
- Water scarcities – Decade for Action (UN, 2005), Global Water Scarcity Risk Report (Lloyds)

Implications: Brands are increasingly urged to adapt operational and engagement models – in order to align with consumer, environmental and legislative pressures.

Resources: "Ecological Economics: The Science and Management of Sustainability" (Wainger, Constanza, 1991), Social and Ecological Systems (Berkes, Folke, Colding, 2000)

Extrapolation: 10 and 25-years out, brand engagement models profoundly change to accommodate growing concerns with sustainability – creating new values.

Counter Trends: Climate Change Denialism, Periodic Change Positivism

Sustainability Implementation Model



Graphic courtesy of The Institute for Sustainability – A Division of Resource Associates Corporation. © Copyright 2011



Trend: Operationalizing Biological Metaphors

Trend type: environmental & technological

Trend Summary: The complexified relationship between the economic, social and natural environments combined with the emerging global scarcities, gives rise to a search for improved engagement models.

Trend Description: The growing recognition of the failure of linear thinking and determinism as the effective social, economic, and organizational strategies within a complex world, creates a search for improved metaphors and organizational models at every level – leading to the process of actively operationalizing “life’s principles” into various organizational structures.

Signals:

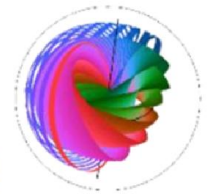
- Network Organizations – Structure, Form and Action (Nohria, 1994), Forms of Organization (Podolny, Page, 1998), Management Paradigms (Borgatti, Foster, 2003)
- Adaptive Organizations – Self-Organized Business (Clippinger, 1999), Complex Adaptive Systems Models for Organizational Change (Dooley, 1997)
- The Rise of Biomimicry – Sustainable Strategies (Hitchcock, Willard, 2009), Social Insects Design (Holbrook, Clark, 2010), Holism Engineering (Reap, Baumeister, 2005), Orgs (Boyd, 2009)
- Adoption of Complexity Paradigms – Complexity and Organizational Change (Glenn, Malott, 2006), Chaos and Complexity in Government (Kiel, 1994), Organizational Structural Inertia (Hannan, Freeman, 1984), Hierarchy and Panarchy (Holling, 2001)

Implications: Brands and organizations are challenged to outgrow the linear engagement models – and adapt organic metaphors for coping with complexity.

Resources: “Ecological Economics: The Science and Management of Sustainability” (Wainger, Constanza, 1991), Social and Ecological Systems (Berkes, Folke, Colding, 2000)

Extrapolation: 10 and 20- years out, every aspect of brand engagement ecosystems is profoundly affected by life design models – to achieve resiliency and sustainability.

Counter Trends: Complexity Denialism, Economic Determinism, Optimistic Inflexibility





Trend: Embedded Collaborative and Awareness Tools

Trend type: technological & economic

Trend Summary: The explosive growth of these tools – with their ever-increasing pervasiveness – affects how Brands and Organizations of all sizes structure, interact and operate.

Trend Description: The synergy of mobile location-aware devices, an emerging “networked trust” economy and the increasingly embedded social media landscape create “perfect storm” conditions for the gradual, systemic and persistent adoption of collaborative and awareness tools across a wide range of contexts – including consumer space, health-care and government.

Signals:

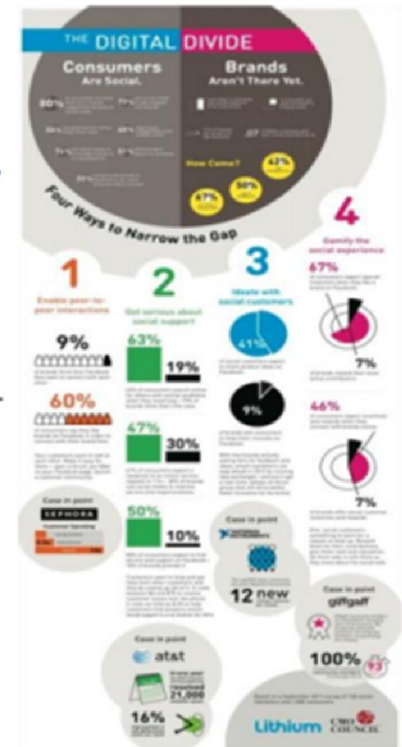
- Mobile Location-Aware Information Engagement – Rapid adoption of devices and services drive location-independent, location-aware, increasingly complex in-context modes of information consumption (Abowd, Atkeson, Kooper, 1997) – and associated consumer expectations across a wide variety of market segments and spaces.
- Networked Trust Economy – Personal, economic and purchase decisions as well as other transactions are increasingly being inflected through an ecosystem of “networked advisory” products, devices and services – that are often social in nature, and are increasingly being merged with expert systems (such as in healthcare applications).
- Intrinsic Social Media Landscape – The rise of social-media-based apps and devices, advisory networks and services is changing the landscape of interactions (Oksman, 2004) as well as expectations from brands, and other organizational structures.

Implications: Brands and organizations are increasingly urged to adopt complex collaborative and awareness tools in their operations and external interactions.

Resources: "Notification and awareness: synchronizing task-oriented collaborative activity" ([Carroll, Neale, Isenhour, Rosson, 2003](#)), Awareness and Collaboration ([Leinonen, 2005](#))

Extrapolation: 10 and 25- years out, brand engagement ecosystems are deeply embedded in collaboration and awareness contexts with diverse interactions.

Counter Trends: ‘Slow-Down’ Movements, Technology Counter-Culture, Back to Basics



Trend: Multi-faceted Brand Theory

Trend type: social

Trend Summary: Increasingly, organizations charged with growing or expanding the mindshare of a brand are looking towards possible differentiators such as enhancing the brand experience and hitting emotional triggers.

Trend Description: Brand as representing a product has become commoditized to the point of the experience of the brand is seen as the only differentiator and the lone path to innovation. Brands look to exploit the notion of experience and emotion to bring this differentiator to life.

Signals:

- Experiential marketing agencies/events; Immersive brand events (Burberry Kiss, McCormick's Spice, Experience travel)
- Growth in academia of the study of these brand theories
- Growth of immersive technology (Kinect, Surface, Augmented Reality)

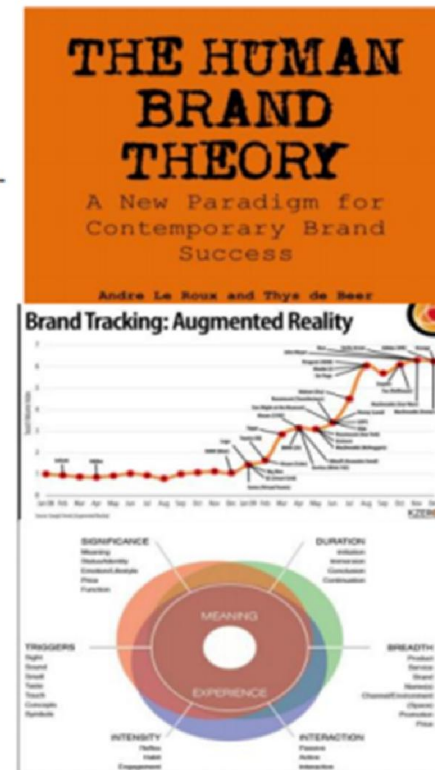
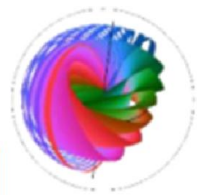
Implications:

- May work to grow the persuasive power of a brand
- Grow market share of a brand; economic impacts
- Impact social mores and culture
- If a brand gets this right then they can improve the customer experience; build advocates; make more money

Resources:

- Experience Economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1998)
- Experiential Marketing (Schmitt, 2003)
- Emotional Branding (Gobe, 2001)
- 4D Branding (Gadd, 2001)
- Experience Design (Shedroff, 2007)

Counter Trends: negative measure of customer engagement over time; emergence of generic modular products (no name); moments of truth being rethought (not f2f)





Trend: Brand Evolution as Identity Design

Trend type: social & economic & values

Trend Summary: Brand as holder of identity goes back to the origins of branding. (before it was used as a competitive advantage). This trend maintains the notion of ownership and possession

Trend Description: This trend manifests in a variety of ways from designing brand experiences (Disney, Disney cruises etc) to the notion of self and personal branding. The anecdotal verbatim of things like “We’re a Disney family” as declaration of brand as a lifestyle, or self-brand as a definition of proposed identity.

Signals:

- Designing Brand experiences: Disney, Rocky Horror, Westjet, Southwest, Apple
- Personal Branding and Self-Branding: Orlan to couple branding, to social media profiles
- Active Presumers - people who need to be the first consumers – thirst for exclusivity and being “first”

Implications:

- Opens up potential new industries
- Potential impact on communities and communication (authenticity and location of identifiers)
- Social impact on individuals, notion of family

Resources:

- Marketization and the Recasting of the Professional Self: The Rhetoric and Ethics of Personal Branding Daniel J. Lair, Katie Sullivan, and George Cheney
- Personal Branding and the Commoditization of Reflexivity, Lionel Wee

Extrapolation: Rise of individualism, rise of cult, groupthink, multiple identities.

Counter Trends: Technology as identifier: retina scans, fingerprints, privacy laws.



Trend: Adaptive Organizational Structures

Trend type: social & technological& economic

Trend Summary: Shift in traditional organizational architecture in terms of workplace design, managerial structures, HR practices, virtual workforce, length and location of workday.

Trend Description: Since the birth of the corporation and the birth of modern day brand, organizations have more or less upheld similarities in architecture and governance. Technology has afforded many shifts in how we communicate within an organization and by extension how the employees of an organization support the brand vision.

Signals:

- Ecosystem as an organizational metaphor
- Organizational Design modeling approaches
- Employee engagement techniques and models
- Transitional organizational design models

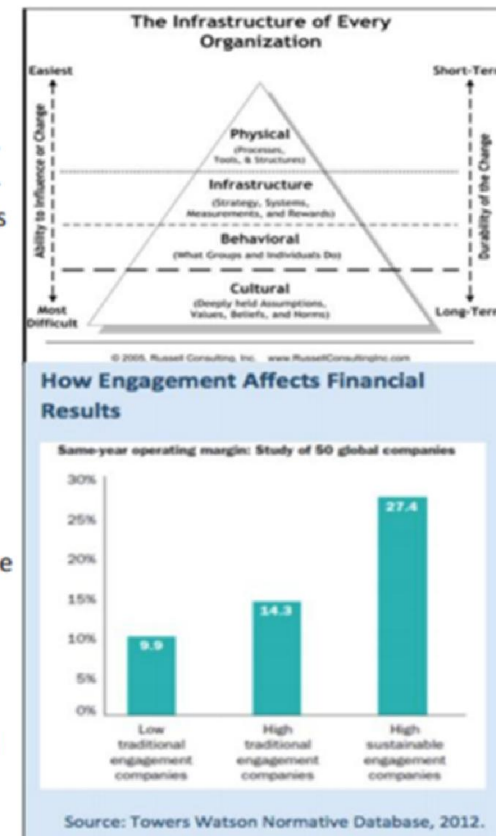
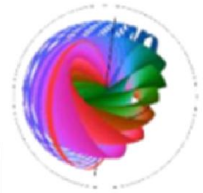
Implications: If brand is the holder of identify and behind any brand is some sort of system that involves people (or requires a one to one or one to many or many to many interaction. Therefore the actual survival of brand would rely on the survival or “thrivability” of an organizational system and would be dependent on how engaged the people of that system are.

Resources:

- We Need a Hero! Toward a Validation of the Healthy and Resilient Organization (HERO) Model
Marisa Salanova, Susana Llorens, Eva Cifre, and Isabel M. Martínez

Extrapolation: Well operationalized organizations; co-created spaces “by the people”

Counter Trends: Workplace restructuring; economic shifts





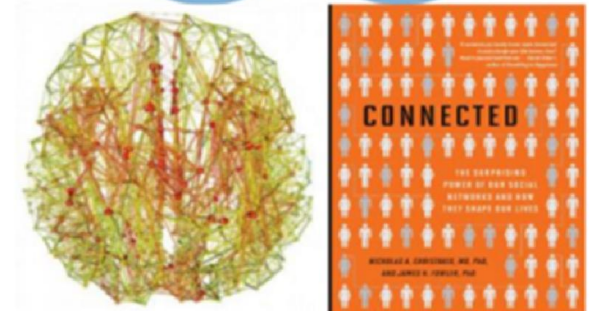
Trend Summary: Existing trend that human-centered design is the main method being used to design solutions to complex problems impacting the notion of brand. This form of design is informed by multiple sciences and systems and network theory.

Signals:

- Implications:** The power of this form of design could create a new paradigm for brands as we know them today. Understanding neuroscience and specific motivator so people could disrupt the notion of identity and brand.

- <http://www.themaritzinstitute.com/#/Perspectives/The-Social-Life-of-Brands.aspx>
- The Connected Company, Dave Gray
- Multiple design books

Counter Trends: Process-Driven Economies, Resurgence of 6-Sigma and “KPIs” as organizational design paradigms.



A high-contrast, black and white close-up photograph of a woman's face. She has dark, expressive eyes looking directly at the camera. Her skin is covered in numerous freckles. Two tears are visible: one on her right cheek (viewer's left) and one on her left cheek (viewer's right). The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of her skin and the intensity of her gaze. The text "critical uncertainties" is overlaid in a clean, white, sans-serif font across the center of the image.

critical uncertainties



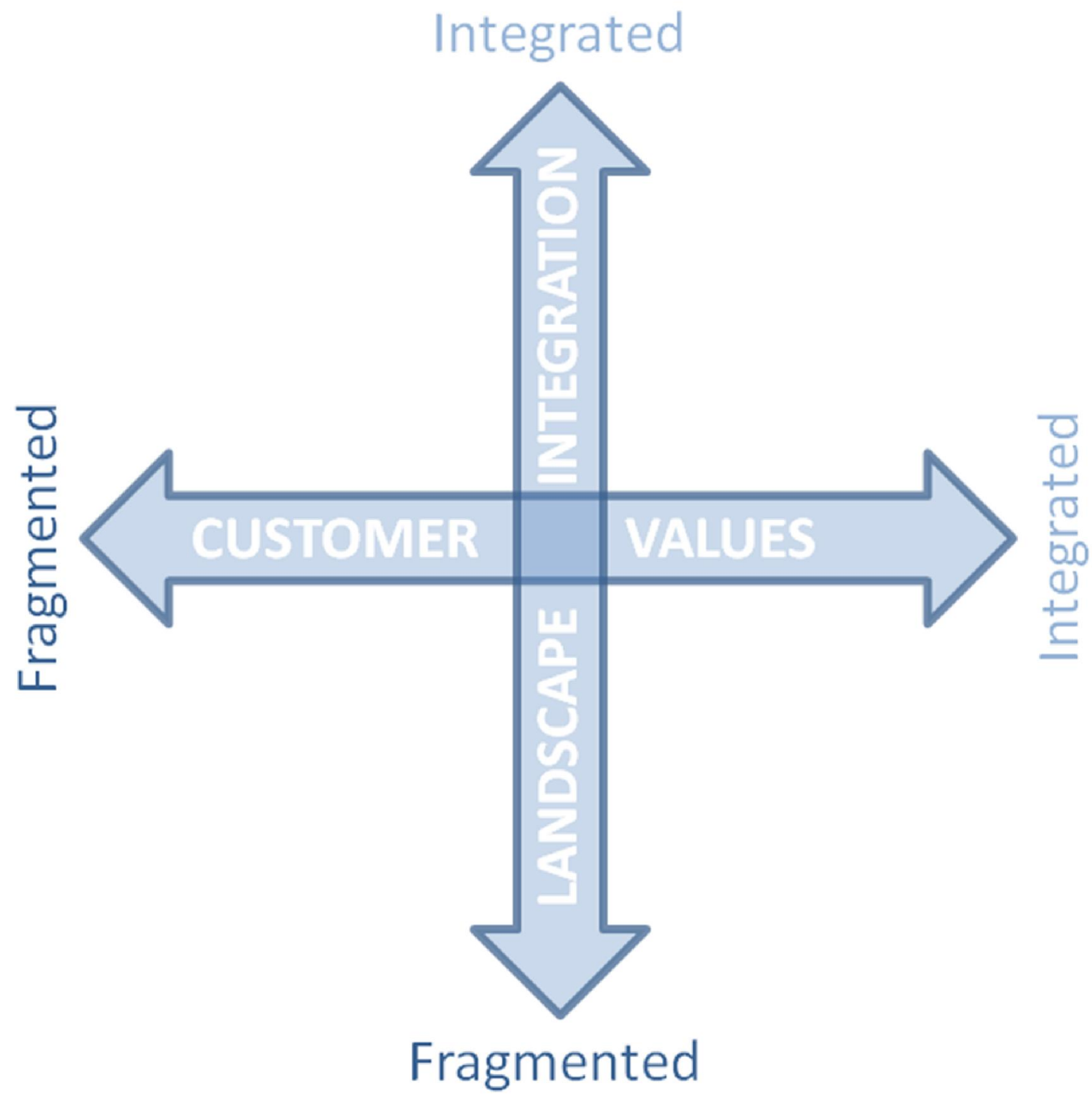
Future Shaping.....

- different future world possibilities implied by key trends and drivers
- what can we define as 'critical uncertainties'?
- brands intrinsically 'adapt' to different worlds



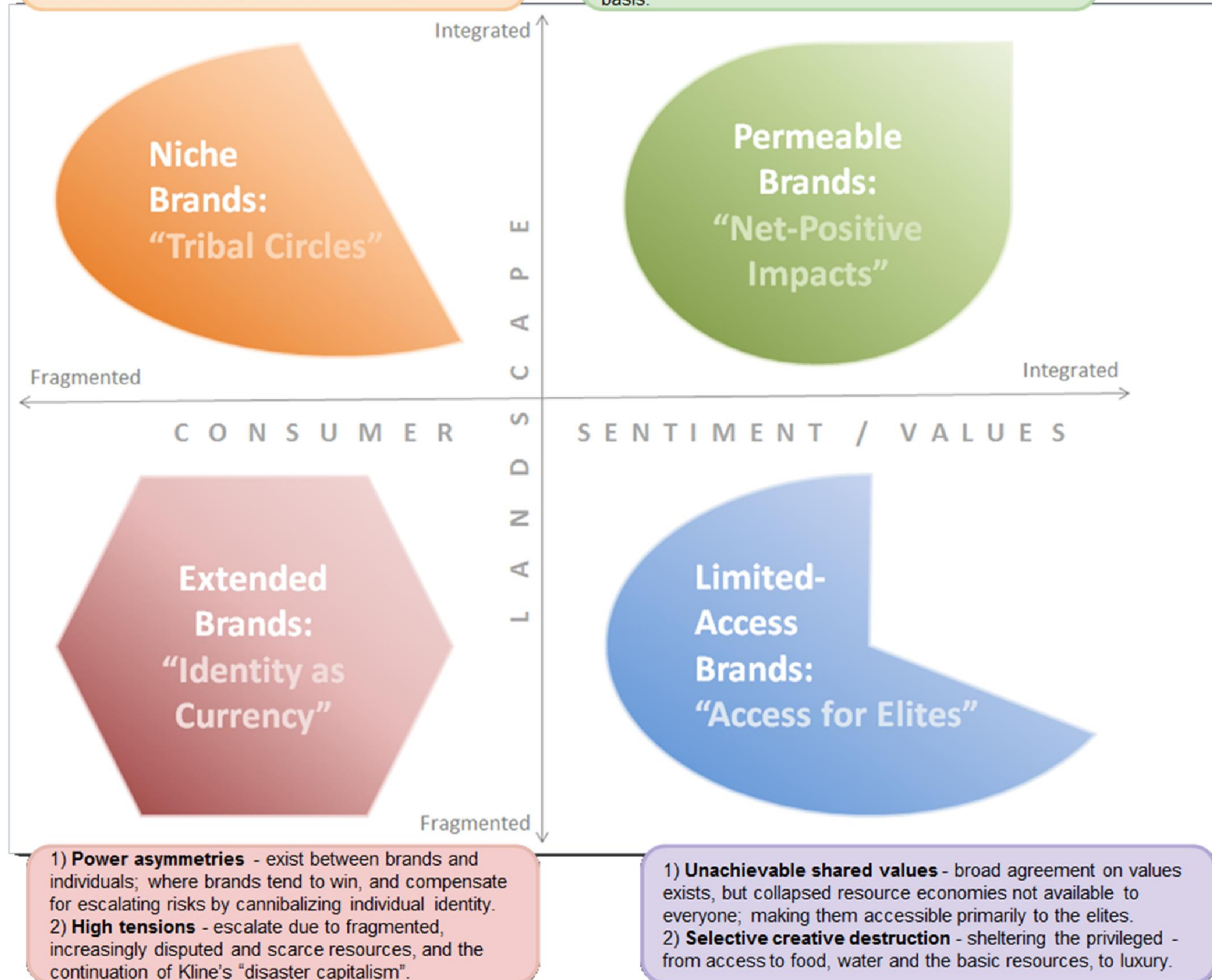
Critical Uncertainties

- Brands do not exist independently in the world, and must actually be actively integrated into the larger landscape – in order to be successful.
- Brands must also be able to successfully interact with people; who rely on their sense of personal, group and societal values, in order to gauge their interactions.
- Based on this analysis, we have identified a “horizontal” and “vertical” axis. On both axis, we have identified that they can be either “integrated” or “fragmented”.
- The horizontal axis was named “Consumer Values”, while the vertical axis was named “Landscape Integration”.



1) **Policy gaps filled by brands** - environmental-economic integration succeeds, but at the expense of segmenting societal groups value-systems.
 2) **Varied intra-group values** - compared to societal norms; more similar to group than to society.

1) **Sustainable economies** - contextualized in "Net-Positive Impacts", of paradoxically increasing value.
 2) **Ecosystem benefits** - Key agreements are achieved on a global basis, and co-exist with smaller areas of tension; mutual benefits are computed on an ecosystem basis.



Brand Qualities in Different Worlds

	Permeable Brands	Limited Access Brands	Niche Brands	Extended Brands
External Perception	Net-Positive: innovate towards ecosystem resilience, balancing needs of integrated stakeholders.	Elitist: focused on securing elite consumers capable of supporting exclusive products and services.	Adhesive: to the defined values of tribalized communities - with “sticky” product offerings.	Avaricious: usurping individual and collective spaces, identity, rights and freedoms.
Internal Perception	Resilient: accommodate diverse audiences and continually evolving views to thrive amidst constant change.	Non-mediatory: absolving opportunity for creating cohesion, and profiting in societal fragmentation.	Reflective: of balancing conflicting needs of communities vs. integrated environmental demands and values.	Resistant: to negotiating power, influence and decision-making processes with others.
Change Perception	Nimble: anticipate and manage shifting landscape relationships, to identify and act on opportunities.	Opportunistic: focused on identifying exciting service offerings within the fickle “elite landscape”.	Zealot-like: professing support for tribalized values, in order to deepen engagement and brand-loyalty.	Fixed: resistant to alternate models of identity, perceived to threaten brand interests.
Self Perception	Authentic: brands come across as trustworthy, and authentically interested in their audiences.	Survivalist: Brand-minded, limited loyalty, focus on growing transactions and short-term profits.	Trustworthy: authoritative within a group context, validating with group trust constructs.	Acquisitive: increasingly owning more of the formerly public assets (“commons”) – such as water).



Fragmentation | Sensemaking

Practical Brand Anatomy

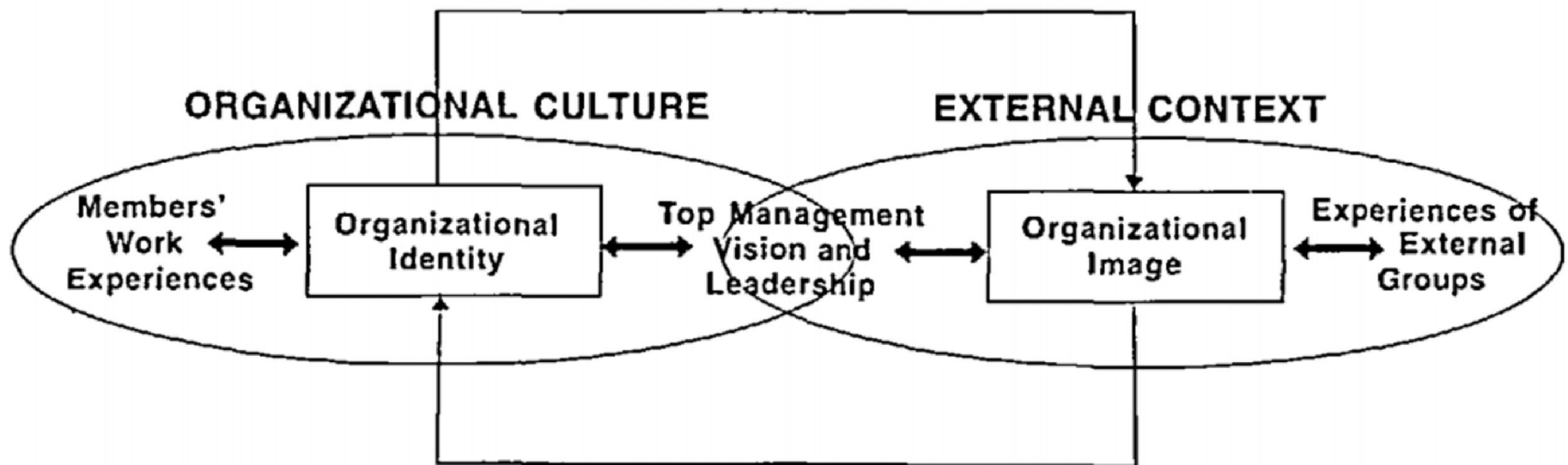
(Lencastre, 2010)



market research and finance evaluation. Finally, managers can avoid the all-so-common reductionist visions of brand practice, the so-called 'branding myopias'.

Org Culture, Identity, Image

(Jo Hatch, Schultz, 1997)



One of the primary challenges faced by contemporary organizations stems from the breakdown of the boundary between their internal and external aspects. Previously, organizations could disconnect their internal functioning from their external relations in the environment because there were few contacts between insiders and outsiders. Top executives, marketing,

Eco-semiotic Locality

(Maran, 2007)

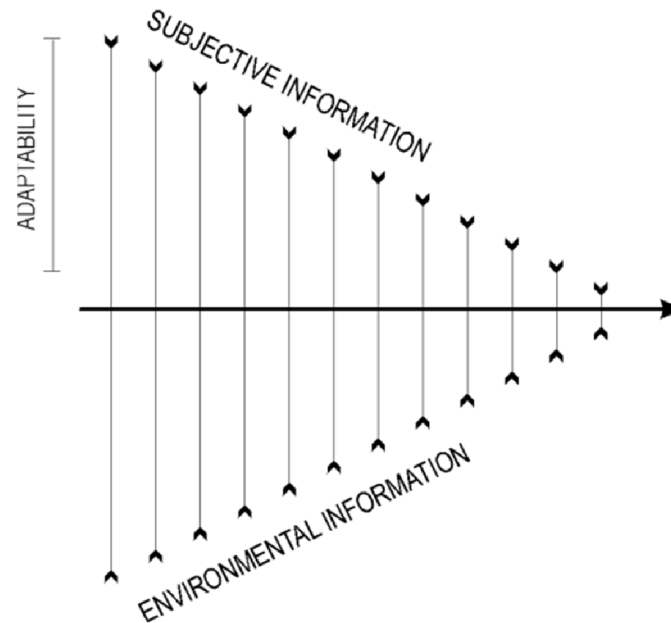


Figure 2. The semiotic adaptability is a process, in the course of which the subject correlates self-related and environment-related information, thereby localising itself in the environment. Semiotic adaptation is, foremost, a time-process.

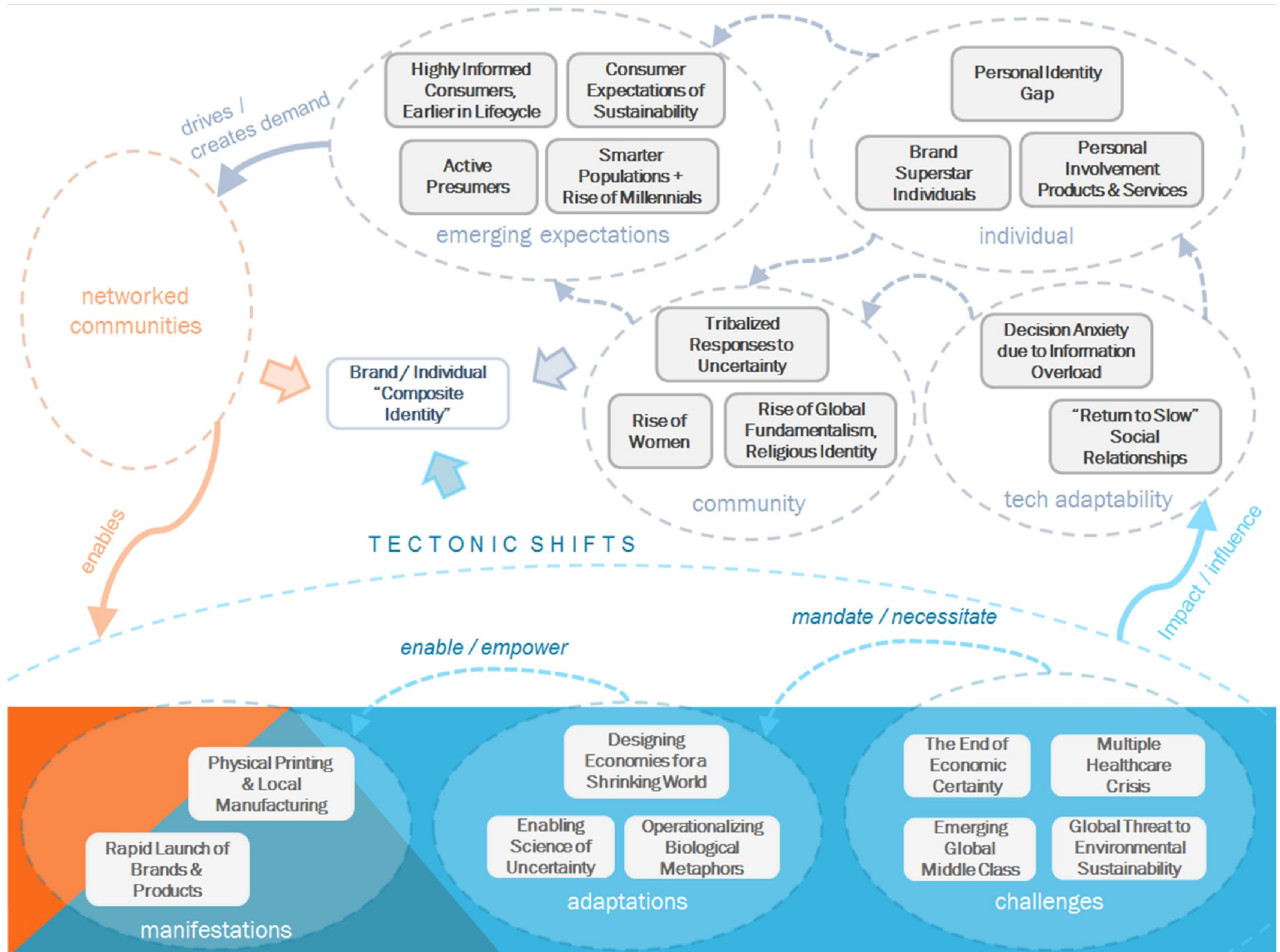


Brand = Identity?

- increasingly, brands themselves are **ecosystems**
- ecosystems appear to be 'fragmented'
- how do we think about 'identity' and 'brand'?

...semiotic approach → analysis





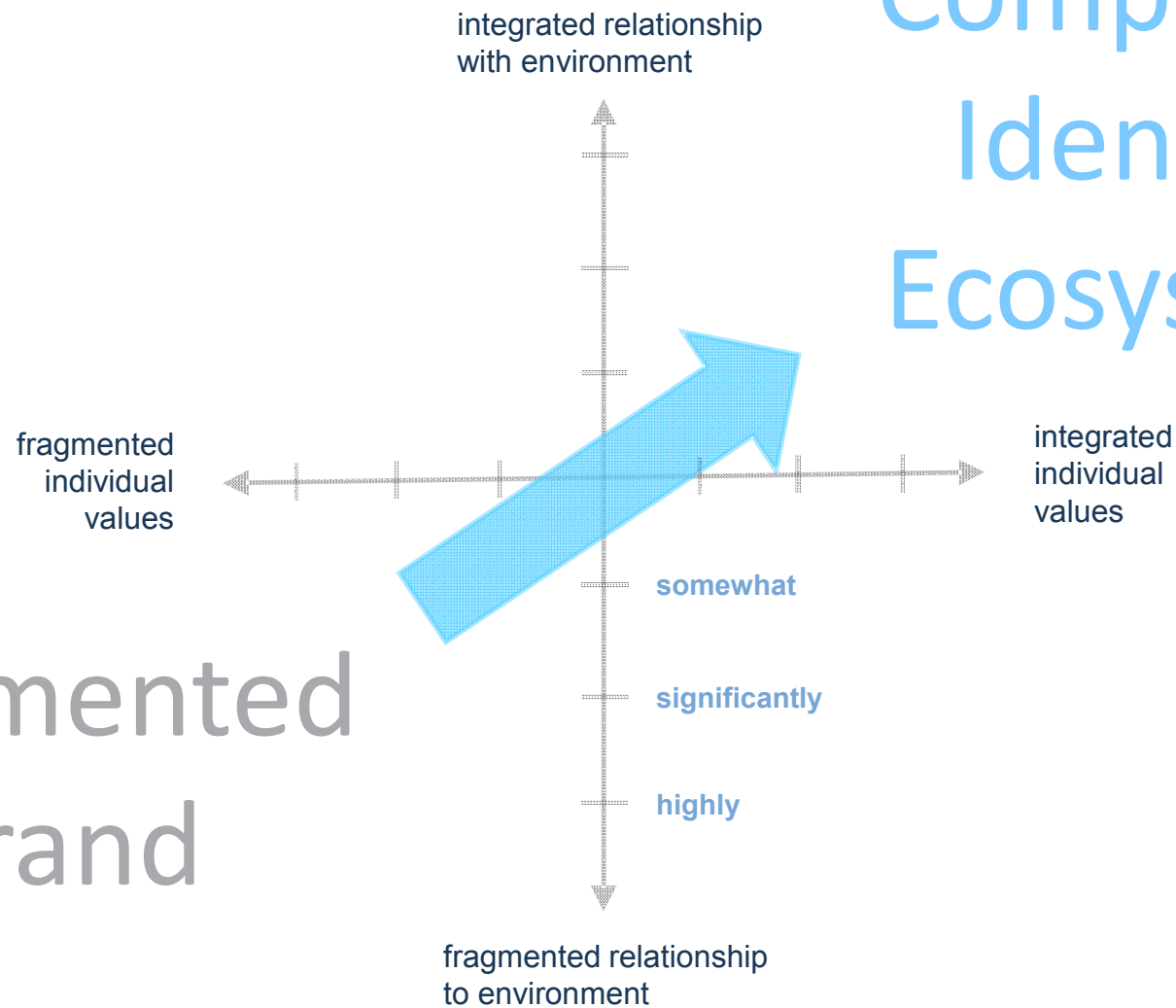


Measuring Alignment

- A new type of 'semantic differential' (Osgood, 1957)
- A 'vector' can be computed showing a differential between the existing brand alignment and the projected necessary direction in the future

Composite Identity Ecosystem

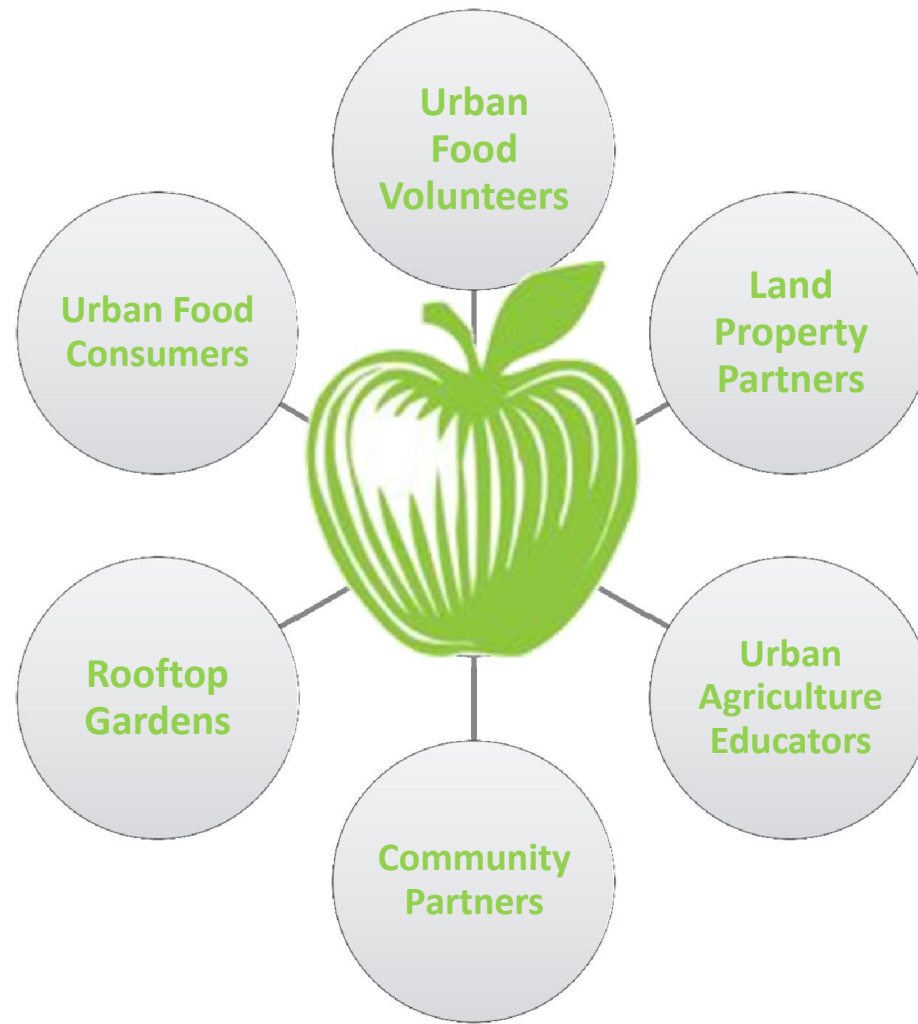
Fragmented
Brand



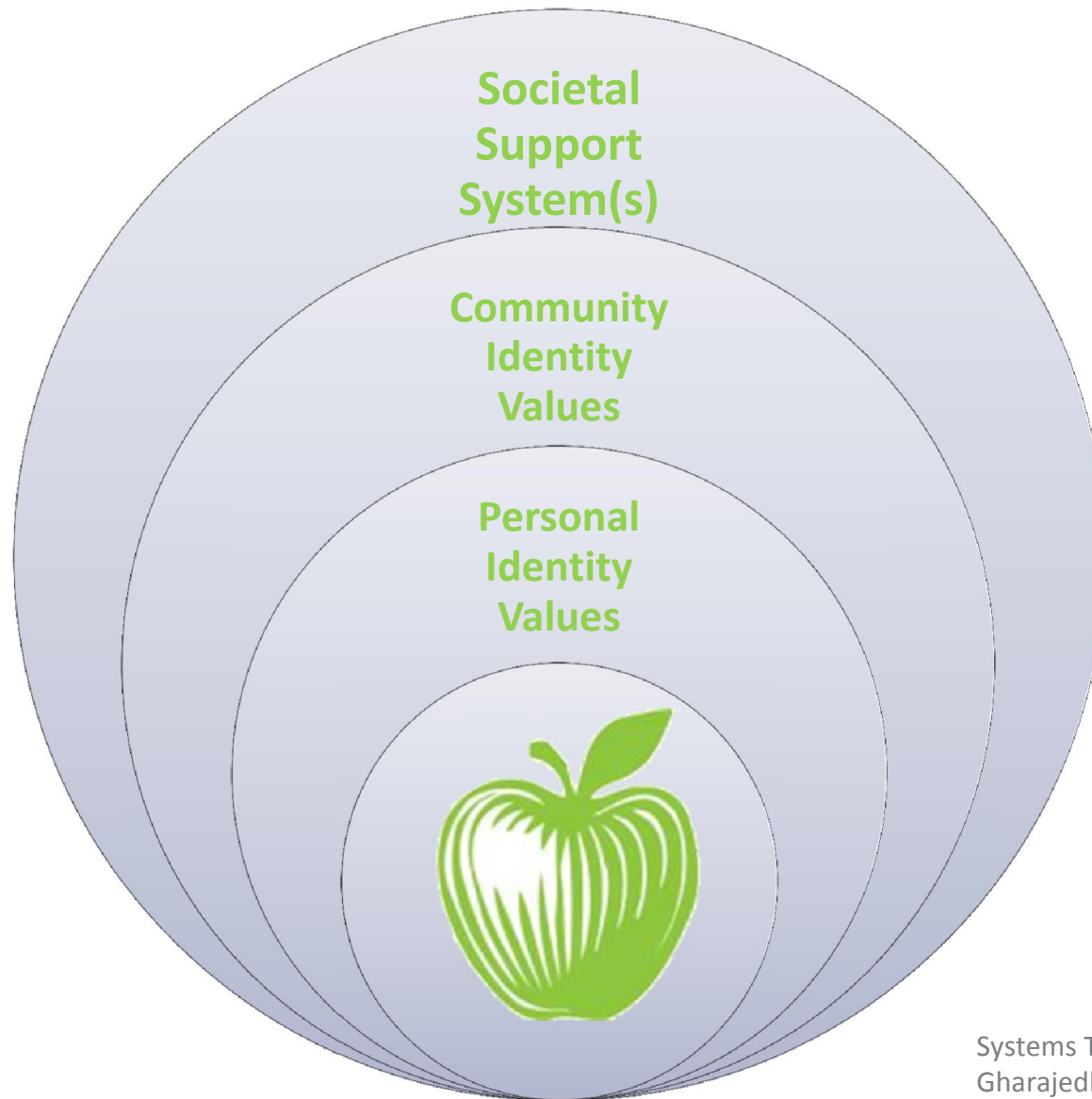
2014



Brand as an Ecosystem: FoodShare



'Composite Identity': Enclosing Systems



Systems Theory: Adapted from
Gharajedhagi

Food Share

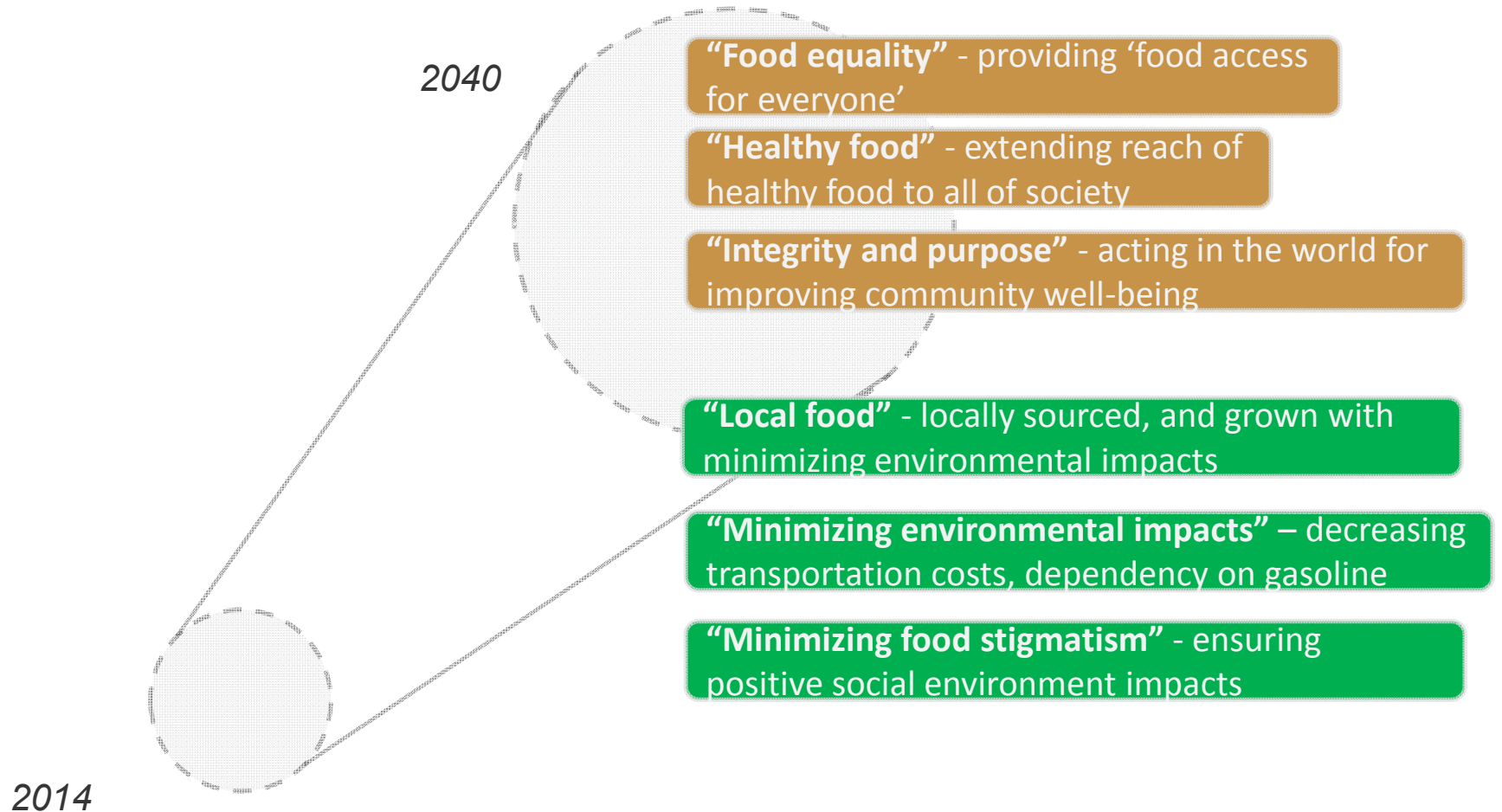


Workshop: find an answer to the question –



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2014 was the year FoodShare went homeless. How might we choose a space that suits and supports the ecosystem of FoodShare?



At your tables...

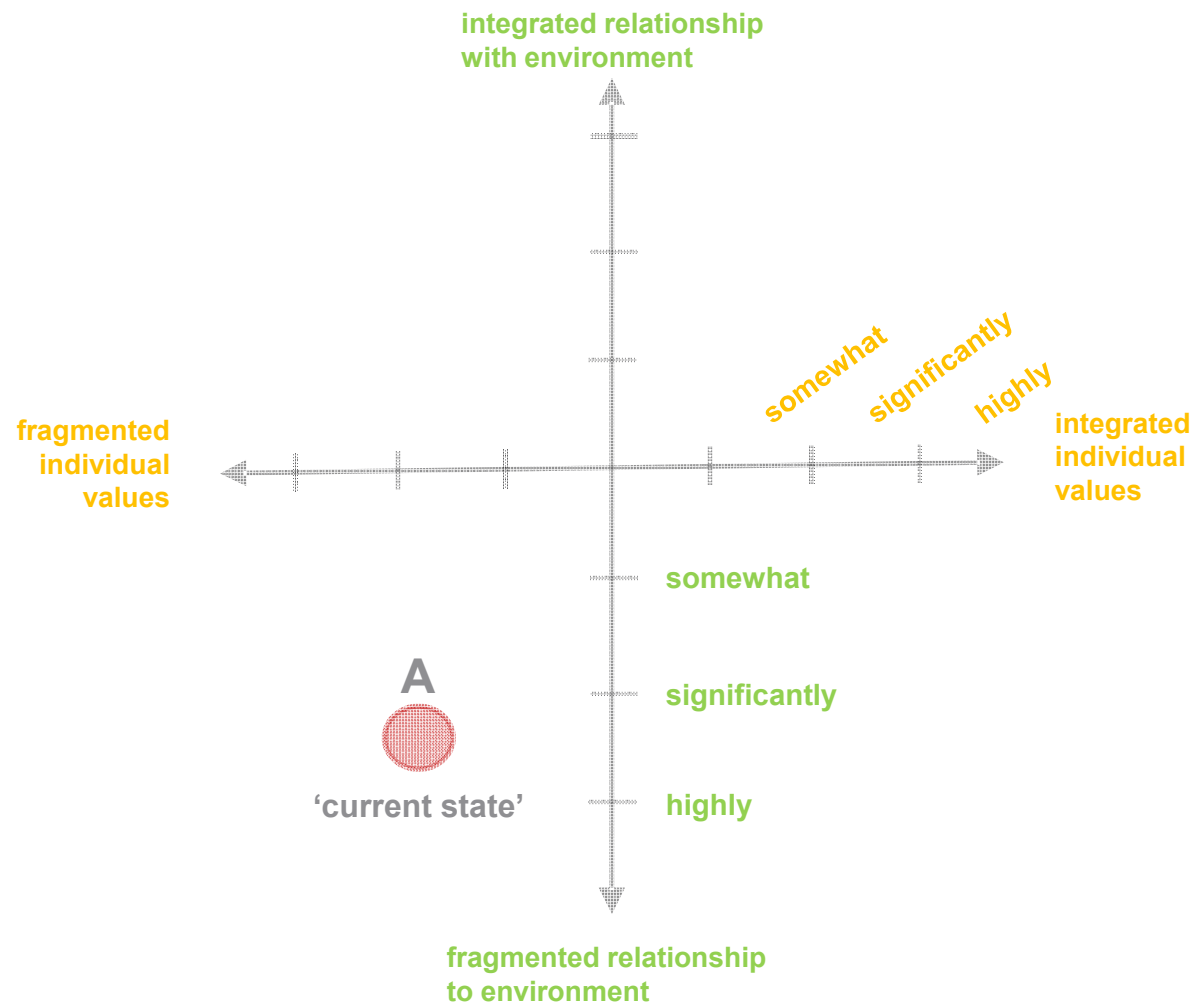


Please answer the following questions with your group:

- To **what extent do your values align** with the core goals of FoodShare, in 2014?
 - Locate your point A
- What **could we have done differently** – in 2014 – to ensure the survival of the FoodShare ecosystem; and, what would those values have looked like?
 - Locate your point B
 - Let's talk about it with your group!
 - Define points A and B

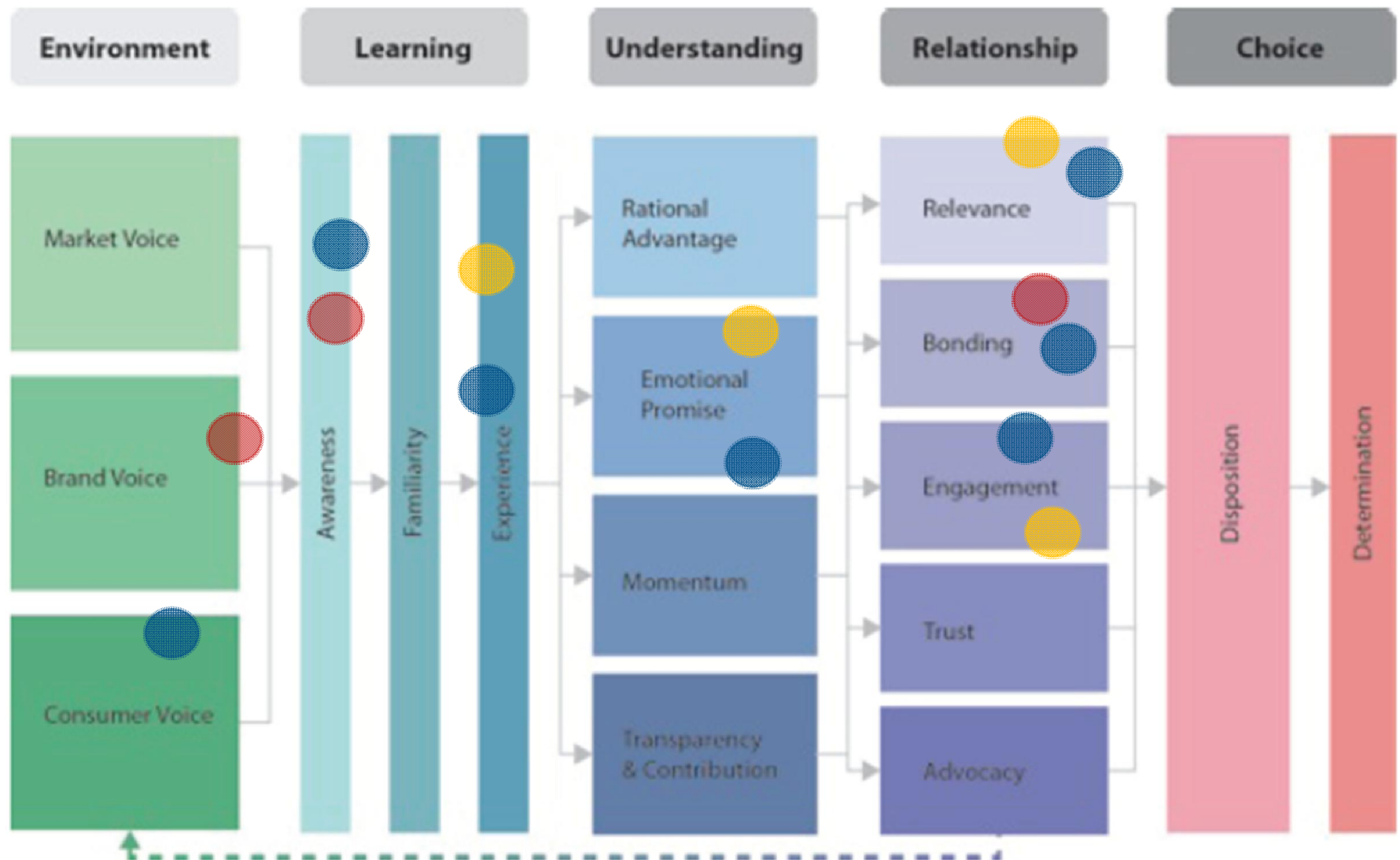
For FoodShare, “integrated with environment” means:

- “Local food” - locally sourced, and grown with minimizing environmental impacts
- “Minimizing environmental impacts” - transportation costs, dependency on gasoline use, etc.
- “Minimizing food stigmatism” - ensuring positive social environment impacts



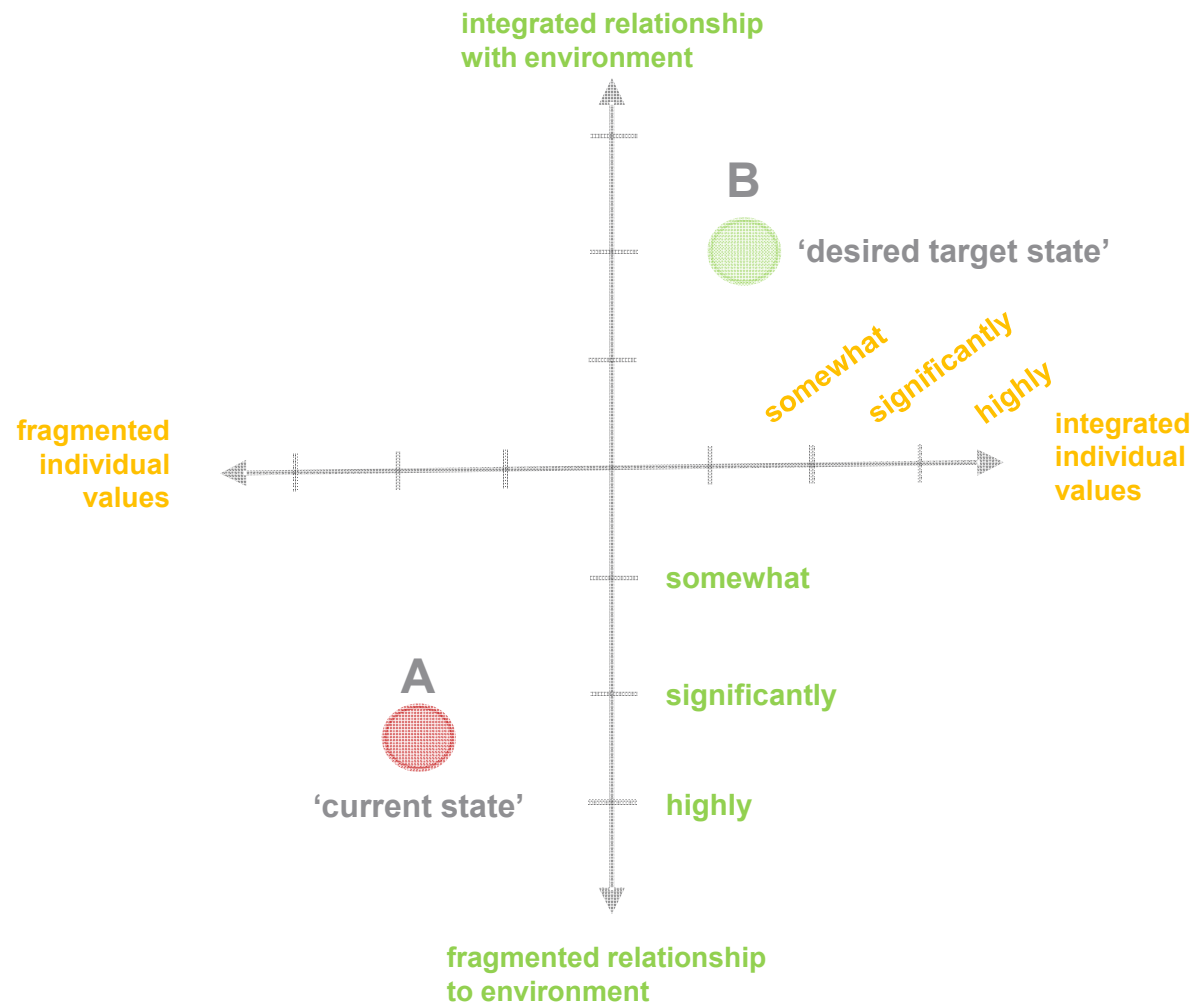
For FoodShare, “integrated individual values” means:

- “Food equality” - locally sourced, and grown with minimizing environmental impacts
- “Healthy Food” - transportation costs, dependency on gasoline use, etc.
- “Integrity and Purpose” - ensuring positive social environment impacts



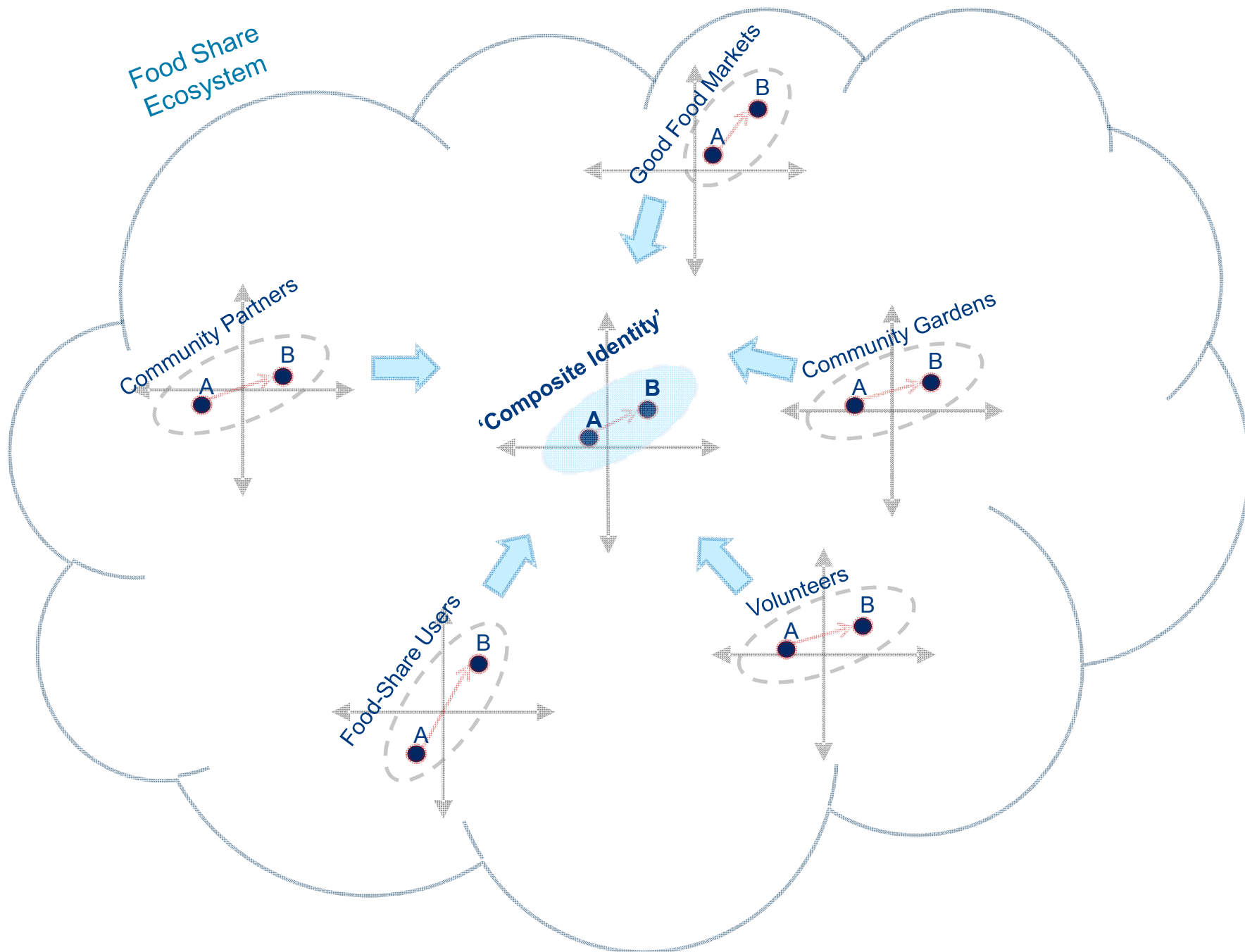
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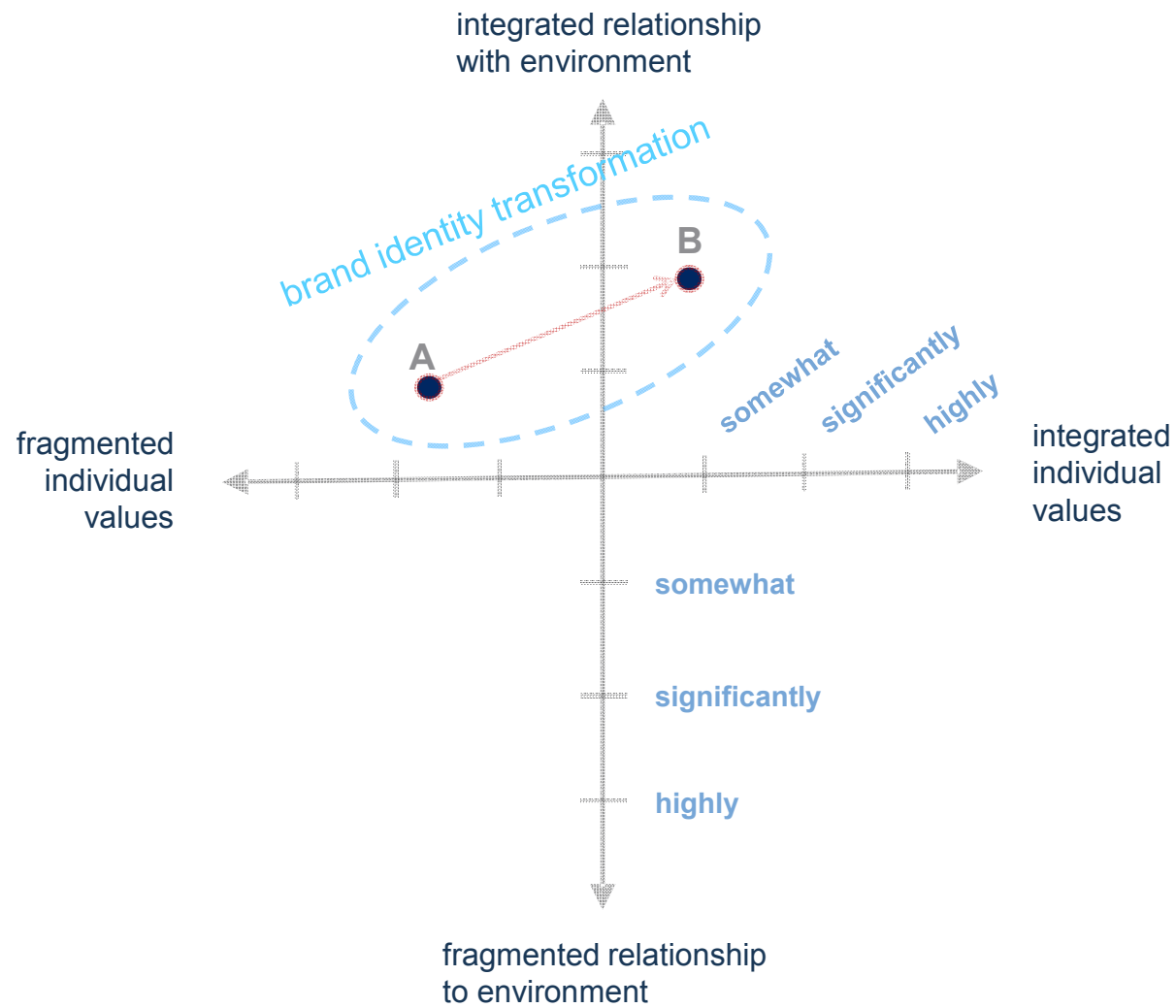
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Key Takeaways.....

- when used carefully, semiotic methods can be particularly powerful to clarify areas of uncertainty
- the topics of 'branding', 'sustainability' and 'resilience' seem to lend themselves particularly well towards semiotic analysis
- combining research with design thinking, foresight and systems theory can yield interesting approaches
- perhaps most importantly, we owe it to ourselves, the brands we serve and the future generations to investigate and achieve methods for enabling and creating a resilient future

A deep space photograph of a nebula, featuring swirling clouds of gas in shades of blue, teal, and green. The nebula is set against a dark, star-filled background. The text "thank you!" is centered in a white, sans-serif font.

thank you!