

# TRANSFORMING WHILE PERFORMING



**How organisations can find their North Star and  
get everyone to act in days, not months.**

WHETHER YOU ARE A BUSINESS LEADER OR ENTREPRENEUR,  
THIS IS THE PERFECT WAY TO FIND YOUR TRUE NORTH STAR.

- Stijn Nauwelaerts, Corporate Vice President HR, Microsoft



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For Heidi, Manon, Dries,  
Thomas, Talitha and Lou.

Olivier

For Keira, Megan  
and Jessica.

Kristof

our North  
Star



# ENDORSEMENTS

An inspiring and practicable guide to help you kickstart lasting transformation - and have fun along the way.

**Stephen Quest, Director-General Joint Research Centre (JRC) at the European Commission**

A leader's compass for the transformation journey. Packed with structured frameworks and fueled with experience and ideas, this book supports learning, coaching and teamwork on the journey. Great resources for moving forward - now where do you want to go?

**Madeline Martyn, Learning Consultant**

In today's rapidly evolving world, mastering the art of transforming while performing is essential for success. This book expertly guides you through the process, breaking down the necessary skills into simple, practical steps. Whether you're already navigating the challenges of transformation or just getting started, this book is a lifesaver, providing invaluable insights and support every step of the way for organisations to succeed.

**Andre Christian, Vice President Innovation at SES, a global leading satellite operator**

Discover how to transform your organisation into a high-performing powerhouse using visualisation, inspiration, and co-creation.

**Dr Max McKeown, Author of The Strategy Book and other influential books**

Transforming while Performing is a must-read for anyone who wants to thrive in the fast-changing and competitive world of business. This book offers practical insights, tools, visual inspiration and strategies to help you balance innovation and execution, adapt to changing customer needs, and create a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Whether you are a business leader, a CxO, an entrepreneur or an innovator, you will find valuable lessons and inspiration in this book. Here's a perfect way to find your true North Star.

**Stijn Nauwelaerts, Corporate Vice President Human Resources at Microsoft**

Transforming while performing is the most challenging balance act. Now more than ever. With this book, Kristof and Olivier demonstrate why you need this balance and how to obtain it. It's great to see all their knowledge brought down to paper in an easy and accessible way.

**Wouter Quartier, Head of Digital, Transformation and Platforms at European Broadcasting Union (EBU)**

In this volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world we can only succeed with a clear North Star. Olivier and Kristof have perfected the process of defining such a star while having fun along the way. The amazing design and visuals tap into the emotional brain, reducing resistance in the process.

**Elke Van Hoof, CEO at Oh My People (a brand of Huis voor Veerkracht). Professor at VUB. Founder at Ally Institute**

A big challenge in innovation and change is to align stakeholders and management behind a shared vision and ambitions towards the future. This book helps you do just that. Start by asking the right questions and use the practical tools, insights, and step-by-step guidelines to turn your thoughts into actionable steps towards your North Star. Then, take it a step further and engage people to get the gears in motion.

Esther Gons, venture builder, co-author of *The Corporate Startup* and *The Innovation Accounting* book, founder of the *GroundControl* platform

This book is a roadmap for people who seek to empower their teams and create sustainable success. It sparked and energised our team, to build a future on our solid foundation whilst keeping our human DNA. We want to remain an inspiration for the industry.

Lise Conix, CEO at Torfs, a Belgian shoe retailer recognised as one of Europe's best workplaces

The transforming while performing experience was a breath of fresh air for us. Their visualisation and co-creation techniques inspired us to unlock our full potential as a team, creating innovative technologies for a sustainable world.

Yves Van Rompaey, PhD, Senior Vice President Corporate Research & Development at Umicore, a leading circular materials technology company

As a seasoned visual practitioner, I was immediately drawn to this book, which offers a valuable contribution to the field of visual strategy. The authors' successful use of visuals in real-life situations is noteworthy. This concise and well-organised handbook is not only a great read but also a valuable reference, providing practical tips and advice. I highly recommend this book as a useful resource and encourage readers to apply the practical advice provided.

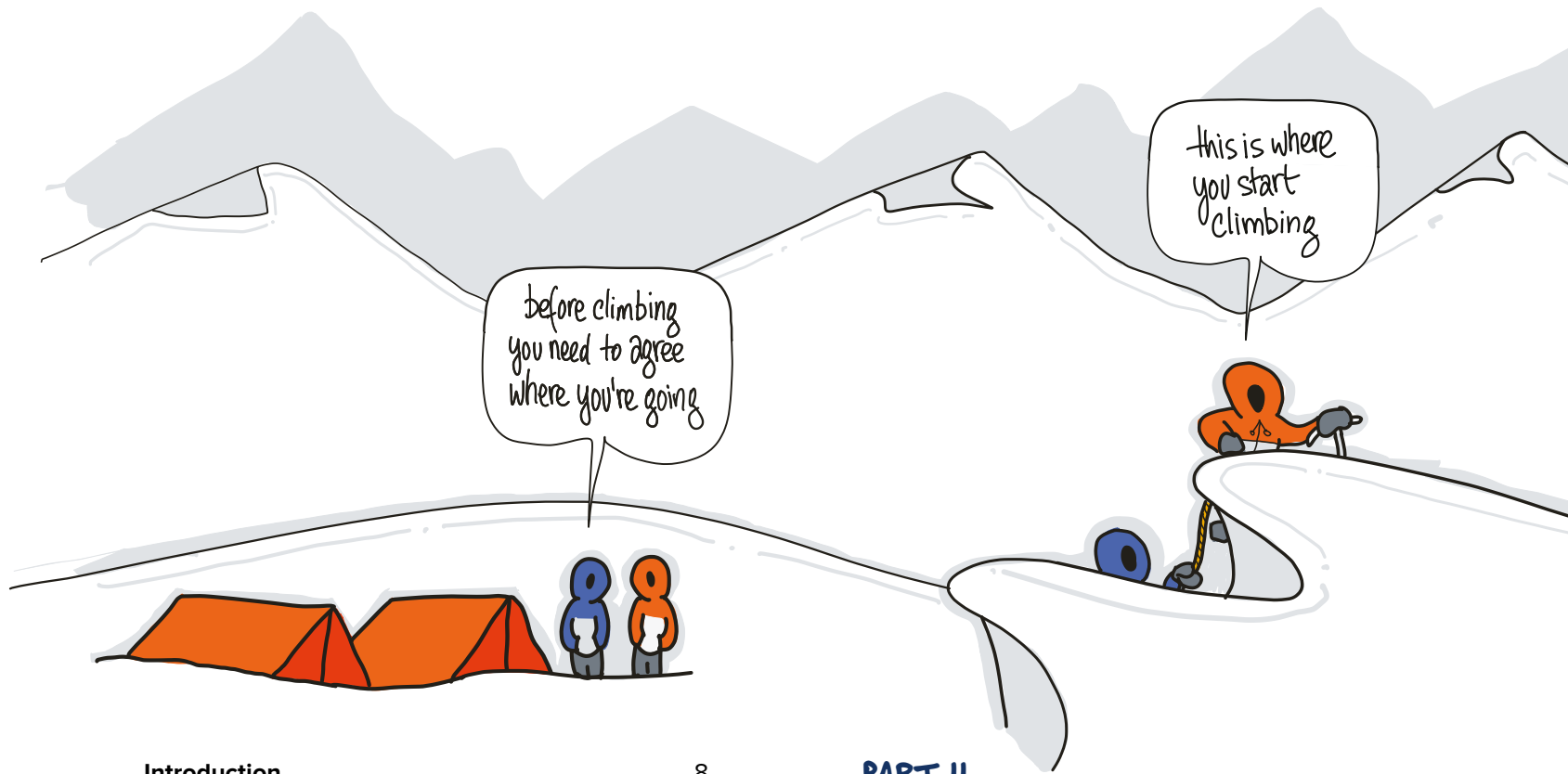
Martine Vanremoortele, founder of [visualharvesting.com](http://visualharvesting.com)

Since engaging *The Visual Senseformers* in our transformation, they have walked with us on the journey, bringing their unique brand of insights, thought-provoking questioning and incredible visualisation. This book offers insight into their magic in helping an organisation shift its direction of travel, align around a strong purpose and motivate and engage teams.

Steve Collar, CEO at SES, a leading global satellite operator

GenAI is expanding human capacities and will co-produce most of our experiences by 2030. As distinctions between in-person and fully simulated reality blend, we must be more intentional about creating spaces for human interaction. In "Transforming while Performing," the authors take us on an immersive journey to create spaces in the real and in-person that enhance our connectedness, creativity, and collective intelligence. This book is a thorough, well-researched, practiced, and profoundly thought-out field guide for anyone who has struggled to lead with brain and heart.

Maitri O'Brien, author of *New Leaders of Change: How Next Generation of Leaders are Transforming Themselves, Their Business and The World with Purpose and Empathy*



Introduction

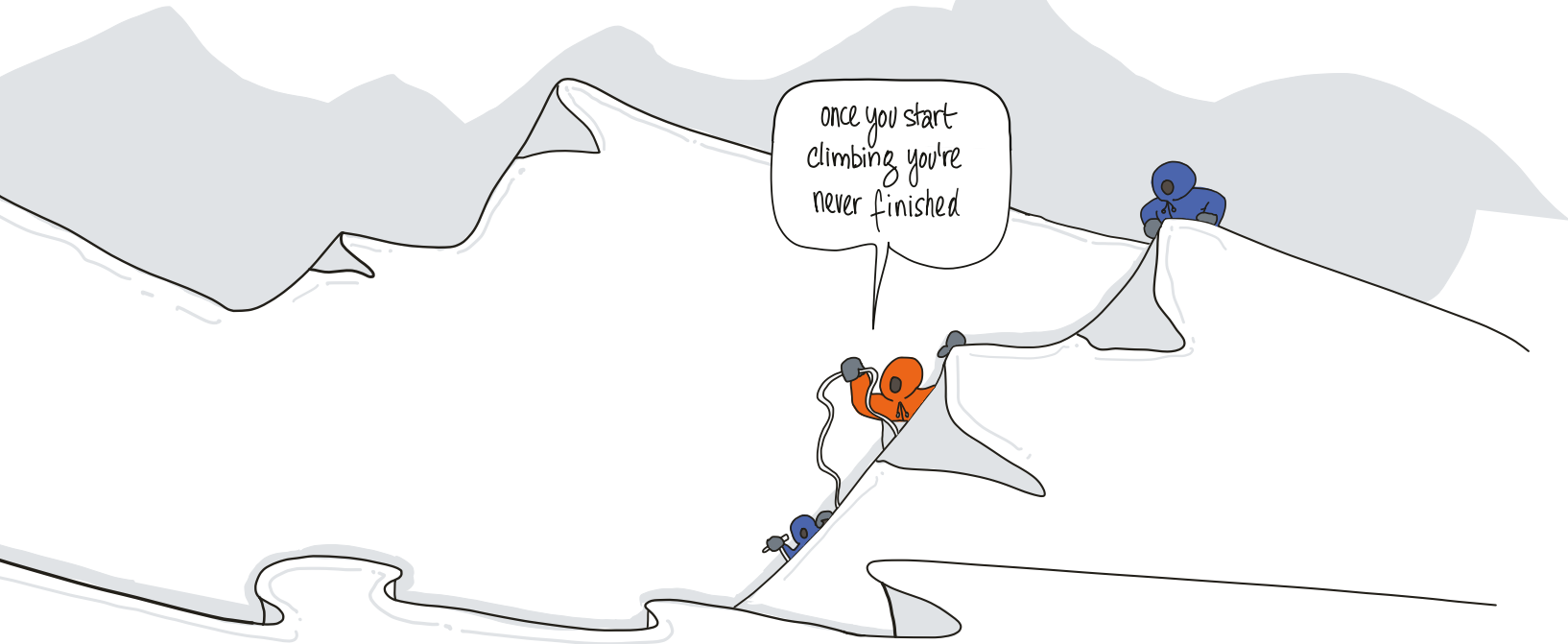
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# INTRODUCTION

Transforming while performing



**HOW  
ORGANISATIONS  
CAN FIND THEIR  
NORTH STAR AND  
GET EVERYONE TO  
ACT IN DAYS, NOT  
MONTHS**



are we there yet?

you okay boss?

where do we go from here?

## IT'S LONELY AT THE TOP

When Brie called us she had a huge problem. She had been headhunted for a top job at an intergovernmental organisation serving various member states, quite a step up from her previous position. But she inherited a conflicted team and a culture of distrust. That with the new job put tremendous pressure on her. From her new boss, from her team, and from partners and customers.

Ben saw his AI start-up grow fast but chewed over how he could scale for global impact. He wanted to develop and execute a sustainable vision and strategy with his core team. The key tenets for their transformation towards a scale-up were agreeing on their storyline and their culture to have a positive societal impact with a scalable AI platform.

John became the CEO of his company through an acquisition in the telecommunications industry. He came from an agile culture but

now faced a conservative board favouring the status quo despite declining profit margins and massive market shift. He needed to act quickly to manage the uncertainty and get his new global leadership to co-create a new vision for the company.

When asked to think ahead three to five years, Thomas, a senior director of a global tech client, replied: “Three to five years? We think in quarters, maximum one year ahead. Twelve to twenty quarters is really a stretch!”

Sarah had been tasked by the minister of health to create an action plan to address mental well-being at work for her country. This work was commissioned by four ministries and gained high visibility. It had to be validated by experts and needed to engage all main actors in the field. Quite an arduous task, but it also had to be done in less than three months.

unclear  
destination

unclear direction  
of travel

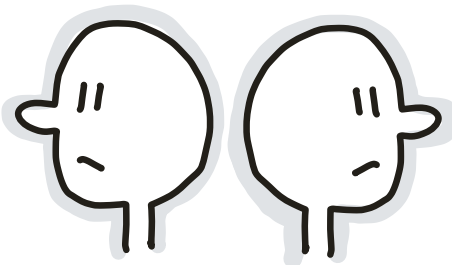
I don't know  
where to start...

not maximising  
collective intelligence

who can I trust

it feels like their plan  
not ours

rapidly  
changing  
world



uninspiring

unimpactful

## THIS FEELS LIKE THEIR PLAN, NOT OURS!

As visual transformers we run into people like Brie, John, Thomas, Sarah and Ben a lot. Maybe you recognise yourself. Are you stuck? Do you feel lonely at the top and find it hard to trust anyone? Do you sometimes feel like an imposter in spite of your skills and experience? Do you need to come up with a new vision, strategy and culture to be able to succeed? You need to transform but you have no idea how. You find it hard to co-create but you know you can't do it alone. You think you always need to appear like a strong leader.

Meanwhile the world is whirling around you and changing at a pace you've never seen. Changes in the way we work and live. Changes in how we interact with each other as customers, citizens, suppliers, partners, colleagues, family and friends.

These situations are not uncommon. Now more than ever there is pressure on every organisation to **Transform while Performing**. It is extremely challenging to keep an open mind to refresh your future vision and define a direction of travel. As a leader, you want to

find out how you can harvest the collective human intelligence to build better strategies and align all stakeholders in a co-creative and inspiring way, so they feel it is their plan, not someone else's. And you need to do it fast? You may even want to turn transformation into a strategic capability? That's exactly what this book is about.

The main question we are trying to answer is "how can organisations find their North Star and get everyone to act in days, not months?" This is the Power Question of the book. More about the use of Power Questions in the first chapter.

## HELP ME TRANSFORM WHILE PERFORMING

To stay afloat, companies and governments we've worked with come to us to find a way to transform while performing. They need to run their businesses to bring value today and reinvent their businesses to bring value tomorrow. They want agility and speed and they need everyone on board. They need to execute the present and invent the future. Transforming while Performing is the new normal.

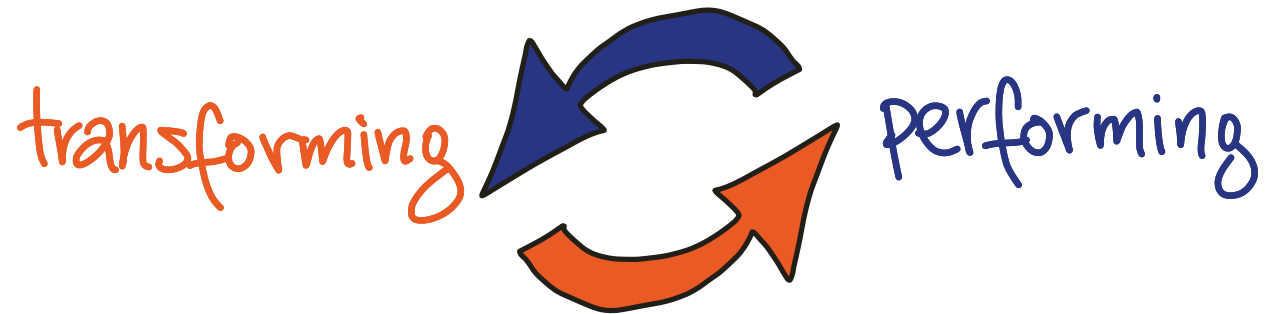
This is no small challenge for incumbents, companies with a legacy, shareholders around the globe, hundreds to thousands of employees and customers, assets worth millions, even billions, proven products and services and established business models. These incumbent companies envy the agility, speed and creativity of smaller entities and start-ups. These smaller players more easily attract skills, culture and entrepreneurship, allowing them to develop new ideas and disrupt entire industries. The larger players may have innovation capabilities, but often lack the ability to transform their operations fast enough into new categories of business.

For those companies transformation is not a strategic capability.

Many incumbents struggle to respond to new entrants in their existing markets. Often their products and services are not what customers want any more. The problem is their existing performing businesses are usually still mostly profitable. They often spot the alarm calls, but fail to respond. It's like they're in a state of inertia. Just like in physics they continue in this state or motion unless that state is changed by an external force. And that is exactly the point.

So ask yourself what is that force that may impact your business in the future? Or is it impacting you already? Does it come from the outside or from the inside?

It could be that you and your teams are blind to the changes around you. That you are not challenging the status quo. You might already be losing key talent or fail to attract new blood. Maybe you are still winning so you don't see the reason to change. It could be you are so focused on the day-to-day that you don't have



time to truly innovate. You just struggle to make sense of what is happening around you.

Meanwhile on our planet every day 250,000 companies are created, 240,000 are going out of business and 10,000 new patents are being filed<sup>1</sup>. Some of this is happening in your industry, with new players like start-ups that don't play by the rules leveraging new technologies to gain market share. They target your weaknesses as an incumbent. It's possible the entire industry you're in is shifting because of changing consumer trends. You may have been investing in innovation. It might even be that you're on to something ground-breaking but not promoting it yet, because it might damage the sale of your core business. It could be that you are clueless as to how you could interact differently with citizens or customers who are more and more polarised and have a growing public mistrust.

Whatever the reason, if you don't act now, it might be too late. So unless you want to be on the long list of organisations that didn't make it, now is the moment to reassess your vision, your leadership and culture. Now is the time to look into your customer relationships, and the ecosystem you are playing in. And evaluate your talent, your assets, your organisational design, your business models, your market offerings. You need to transform your culture, how you think, operate and interact with your stakeholders while keeping your business running. And you don't have months or years to do it. You need to act now, if not someone else will be eating your lunch. And you need everyone to act and get aligned so they can focus on solving the right problems.

The million-dollar question is how do you find that balance between transforming and performing?

## WHY WE WROTE THIS BOOK

We've seen many of our clients struggle with this classic business conundrum: striking the right balance between transforming and performing. Creating new capabilities that transform the business to the next horizon, while running a reliable operational environment for the business. The intensity of one versus the other might vary, and one might be more present than the other during certain periods. It heavily depends on where you are in your journey, where you want to go, what context you are in and what is happening around you. Your current performance fuels your transformation. Your transformation fuels your future performance.

Operational excellence is a mindset that embraces processes and tools to create a culture of excellence within an organisation across the value chain. Innovation excellence similarly is the mindset that embraces processes and tools to create a culture of innovation within an organisation.

Transforming while Performing is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process. Sounds simple. But what's the catch? Focusing only on performance and making operational excellence centre-stage will kill innovation and creativity in your organisation, the essential ingredient for a successful transformation. When performing becomes your purpose, you will cultivate, as time goes by, a talent base of performing experts focused on scorecards, KPI measurement and execution, pushing creative and innovative talent to the basement. In fact, the latter will most probably leave your company and new, creative talent will not want to join your company.

High time you asked yourself: am I able to transform to secure our future and keep performing in the short term?