THE NETWORKED AGE_

# Purpose Pathfinder

## STORYTELLING IN A POLARISED WORLD

ENGINE
mhp mischief

# FOREWORD

**Since we first launched our Networked Age model in 2018, we've been studying the rise of tribalism as a force that shapes the way people relate to the world and each other. Groups and networks are forming around shared values and beliefs.**

In a tribal world, brands have two choices: become part of a tribe or form your own. Either way you turn, a clear statement of who you are as a business, why you exist and your contribution to society is key. A clearly-articulated brand purpose is not just a differentiator, it's now something that many customers, investors and employees expect.

However, as society becomes more polarised, identity binds people within tribes more strongly and that makes finding common ground harder.

In that respect, purpose has the ability to create brand detractors as well as advocates.

The stakes, therefore, are high: get your story wrong and you can lose customers and damage your most important relationships – but get it right and you can build loyalty and engage new audiences. This is a challenge that demands real audience insight, not just professional instincts.

Building on our work with The Depolarization Project, The University of Cambridge, YouGov and More in Common, we have developed a unique new model. The Purpose Pathfinder will help our clients design brand narratives and campaign platforms that speak to tribal passions while navigating a polarised landscape.

For the first time, brand leaders and communicators can understand their audiences' competing expectations, anticipate risks, and build on the aspects of their story that will have the greatest impact. The model will also help businesses who are in the full glare of the public spotlight on contentious topics, by providing useful guidance to inform reactive communications strategies.

**The Purpose Pathfinder helps brands tell stories that resonate with their most important tribes.**

"AS SOCIETY BECOMES MORE POLARISED, IDENTITY BINDS PEOPLE WITHIN TRIBES MORE STRONGLY AND THAT MAKES FINDING COMMON GROUND HARDER"

**Rachel Bower**
Head of Brand + Reputation

# POLARISATION HAS CREATED A MINEFIELD FOR BRANDS

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## Purpose, powerfully articulated, can create competitive advantage for brands.

Customers, investors, staff and stakeholders increasingly believe that organisations must be able to demonstrate the positive impact they have on the world beyond the business of selling products and services.

With the growth of ESG, conscientious consumers and activist employees, the bar is getting higher. Indeed, ENGINE MHP + Mischief's own research shows that:

+ **47%** of people say a brand's treatment of its employees affects their purchasing decisions
+ **41%** say a company's environmental record impacts their choices
+ **32%** would look for another job if they disagreed with the actions of their employer

## At the same time, it's becoming more difficult for brands to know which issues and causes they should publicly support.

In **The Networked Age** – a world that's increasingly volatile, activist and tribal – there is great disparity in the views of different audiences.

In our **Networked Age Guide: Communicating in a Polarised World** (2021), we revealed the huge chasms across many areas of life:

+ **History: 84%** of over-65s are proud of British history, but **42%** of 18-to-24s are ashamed of it
+ **Culture: 79%** of Conservative voters think TV has become too political, compared to **51%** of Labour voters
+ **Economy: 47%** of men think capitalism is a good thing, but only **24%** of women
+ **Media: 54%** of Conservative voters trust information in mainstream news, compared to **40%** of Labour voters

## The last few years are littered with examples of high-profile brands whose 'purposeful' campaigns have received a fierce backlash.

Pepsi's ad featuring Kendall Jenner was pulled after accusations that it trivialised social protests, despite trying to project a message of 'peace and unity'[1]. Gillette's campaign against toxic masculinity was decried for peddling 'feminist propaganda' and alienating core audiences[2]. And businesses including L'Oréal and Urban Outfitters have been labelled 'hypocritical' for their support of Black Lives Matter[3].

**Against this backdrop, brands face a dilemma: how can they show they're doing 'good', when it's getting harder for people to agree what 'good' means? Our answer to this challenge is the Purpose Pathfinder model.**

1 https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/05/business/kendall-jenner-pepsi-ad.html
2 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-46874617
3 https://inews.co.uk/news/black-lives-matter-george-floyd-hypocritical-brands-munroe-bergdorf-433188

# ABOUT THE MODEL

# ABOUT THE MODEL

Purpose Pathfinder

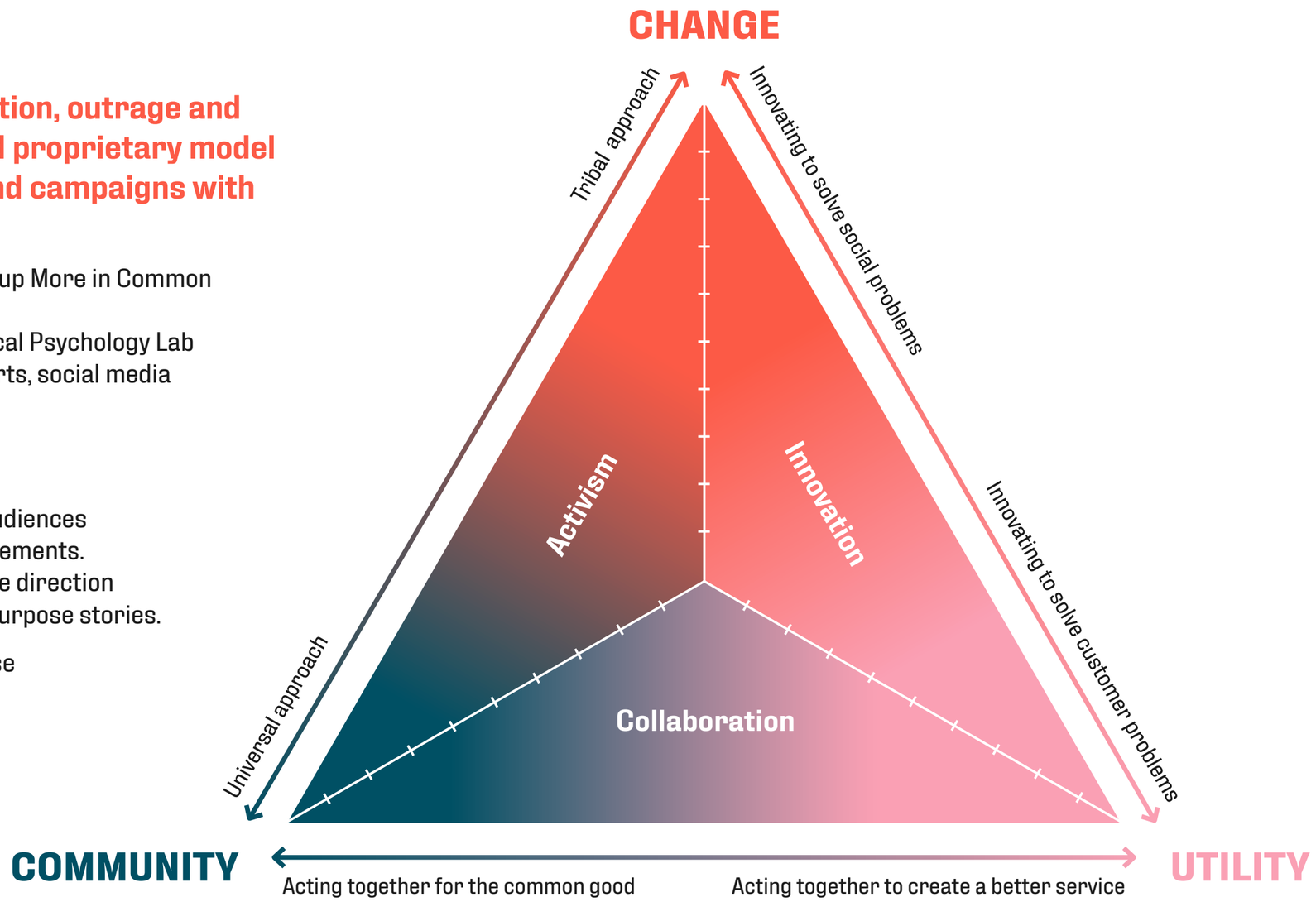
**To help our clients navigate a world of polarisation, outrage and cancel culture, we have developed a unique and proprietary model for brands to align their purpose narratives and campaigns with audience expectations. The model is built on:**

+ Values-based tribal segmentation from social research group More in Common
+ Nationally-representative YouGov research
+ Polarisation data from The University of Cambridge's' Political Psychology Lab
+ Interviews with 500 journalists, politicians, marketing experts, social media influencers and corporate decision makers
+ Data analytics across owned, earned and shared channels
+ Foundation benchmarking of 100 leading brands

This rigorous approach allows brands to see what different audiences expect from them and how they 'show up' against these requirements. As a result, we can make informed recommendations about the direction purpose campaigns should take and how we should tell their purpose stories.

The Purpose Pathfinder is for any brand seeking a new purpose platform, or clarity on how they should communicate their existing purpose to a particular audience.

The model consists of two elements – narrative routes and creative zones.



# ELEMENT ONE: NARRATIVE ROUTES

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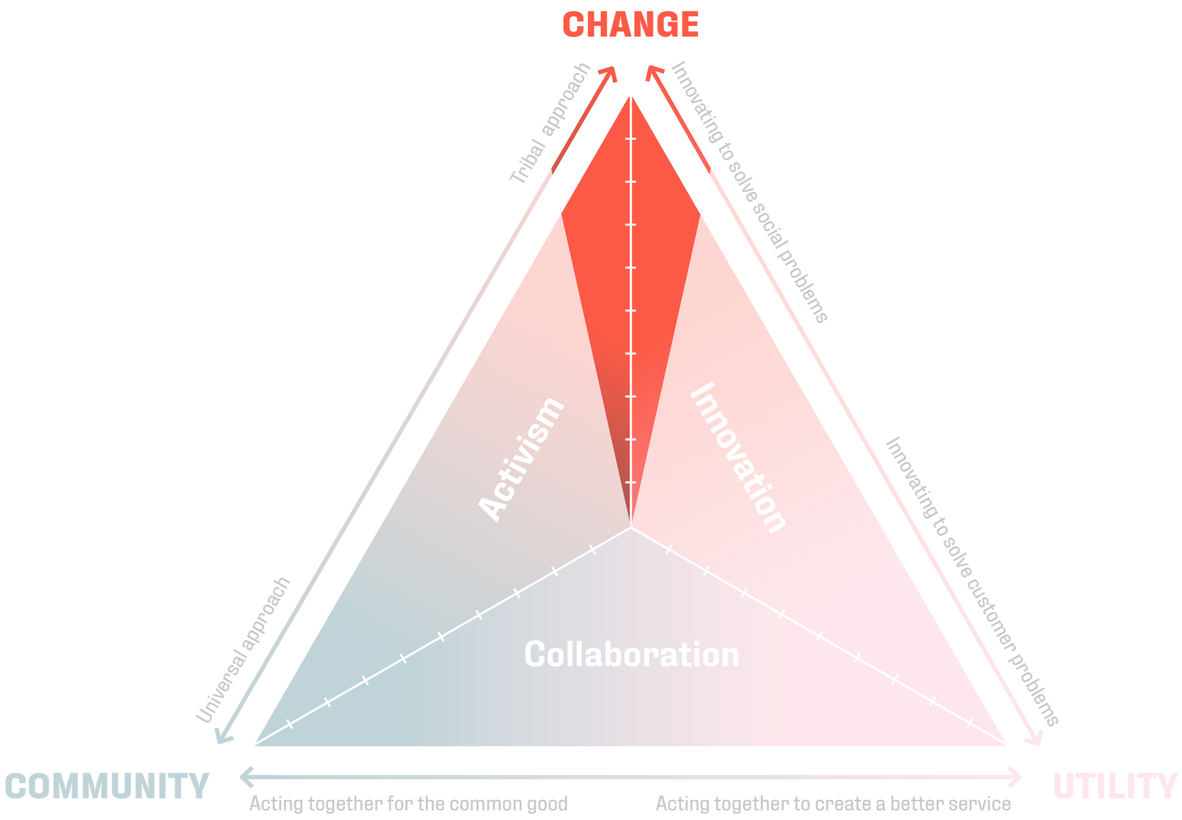
## 1. CHANGE

This route embraces polarisation to strengthen relationships with particular audiences.

Change is about brand activism, creating a better world and taking on 'enemies of progress'.

An example of a changemaker brand is **Patagonia**: an ethical clothing label that is unapologetically committed to the fight against climate change. It has close links with grassroots environmental groups and even sued Donald Trump for putting Native American land at risk. Patagonia's approach doesn't resonate with everyone, but it's not intended to.



# ELEMENT ONE: **NARRATIVE ROUTES**

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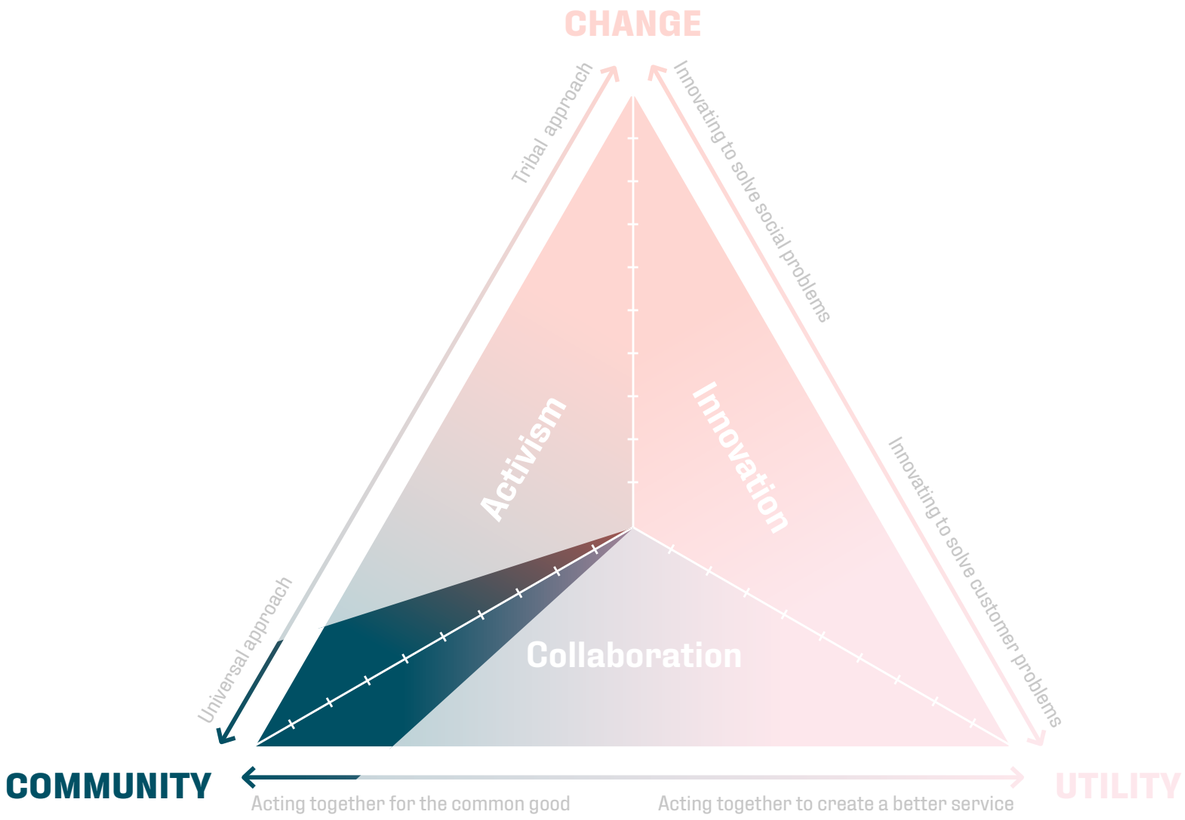
## 2. COMMUNITY

This route counteracts polarisation and seeks to unite different audiences.

Community is about togetherness, fairness and shared interests and experiences.

An example of a communitarian brand is **John Lewis**. It puts its employer brand story at the heart of its communication and used its 2020 Christmas ad to encourage acts of kindness during the pandemic.



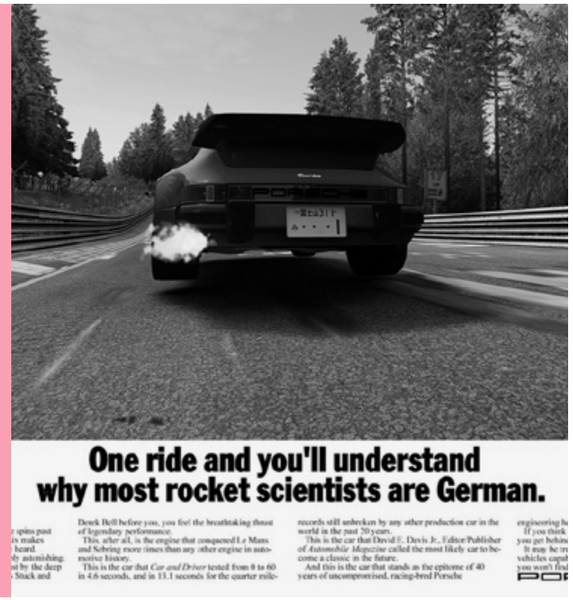
# ELEMENT ONE: NARRATIVE ROUTES

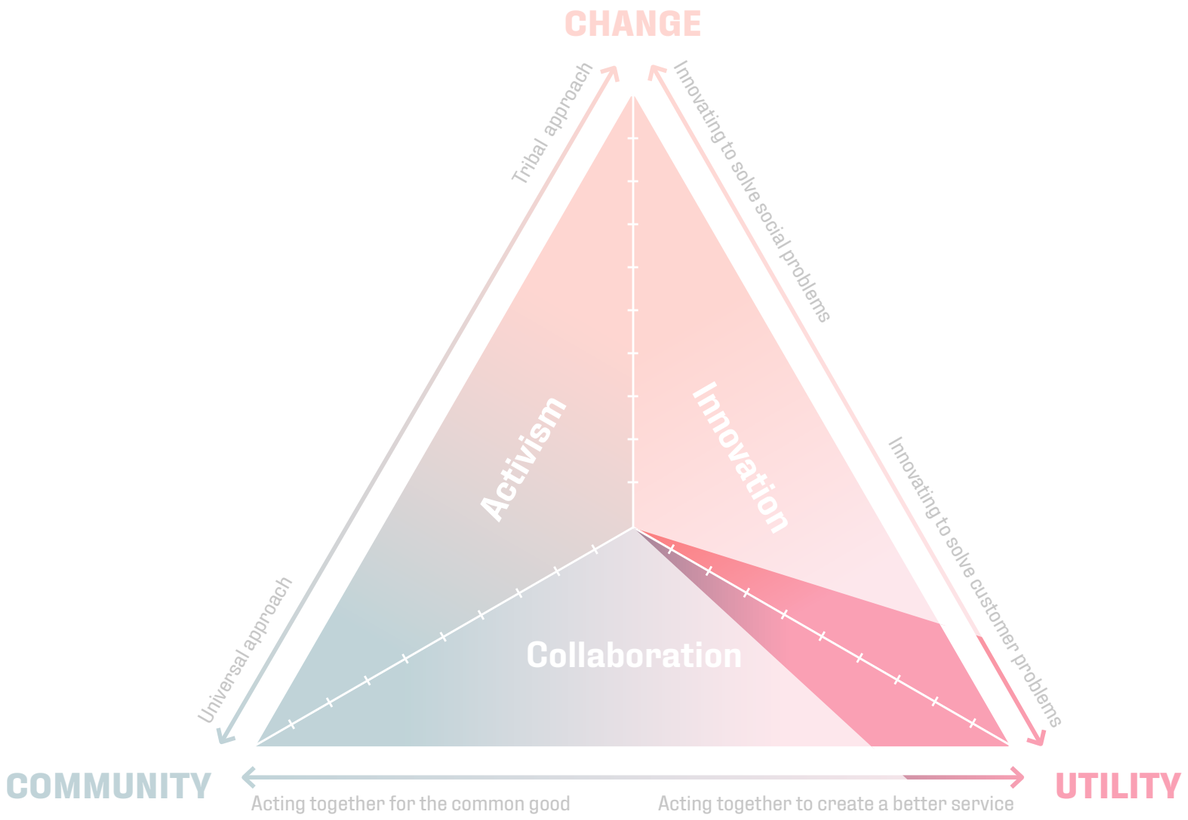
## 3. UTILITY

This route avoids polarisation and focuses on the brand's relationship with individual customers.

These brands promise personal wealth, health, status or fulfilment.

An example of a utilitarian brand is **Porsche**: with the company marketing itself around its innovation and design credentials, and products which 'take your breath away'. As part of this, the brand still focuses on areas such as sustainability and inclusivity, but to improve its bottom line and customer appeal, rather than to benefit society at large.



# ELEMENT TWO: **CREATIVE ZONES**

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**As the Purpose Pathfinder model shows, there are zones between each of the narrative routes to help brands determine the creative approach that purpose campaigns should take:**

## ACTIVISM

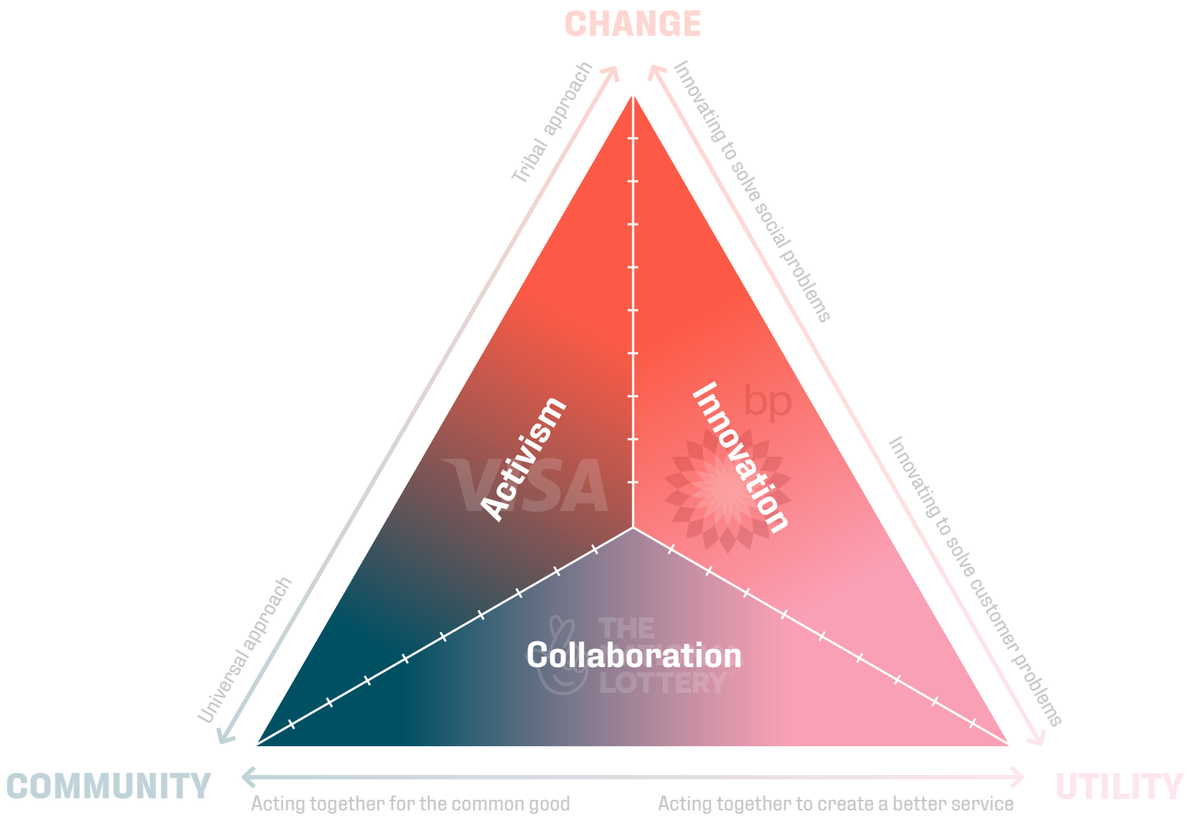
+ Activism is about leading the charge for change, either for particular tribes or society at large. A campaign such as Visa's 'Where you shop matters' – which champions the interests of a particular group (independent retailers) but for the benefit of communities – operates in the middle.

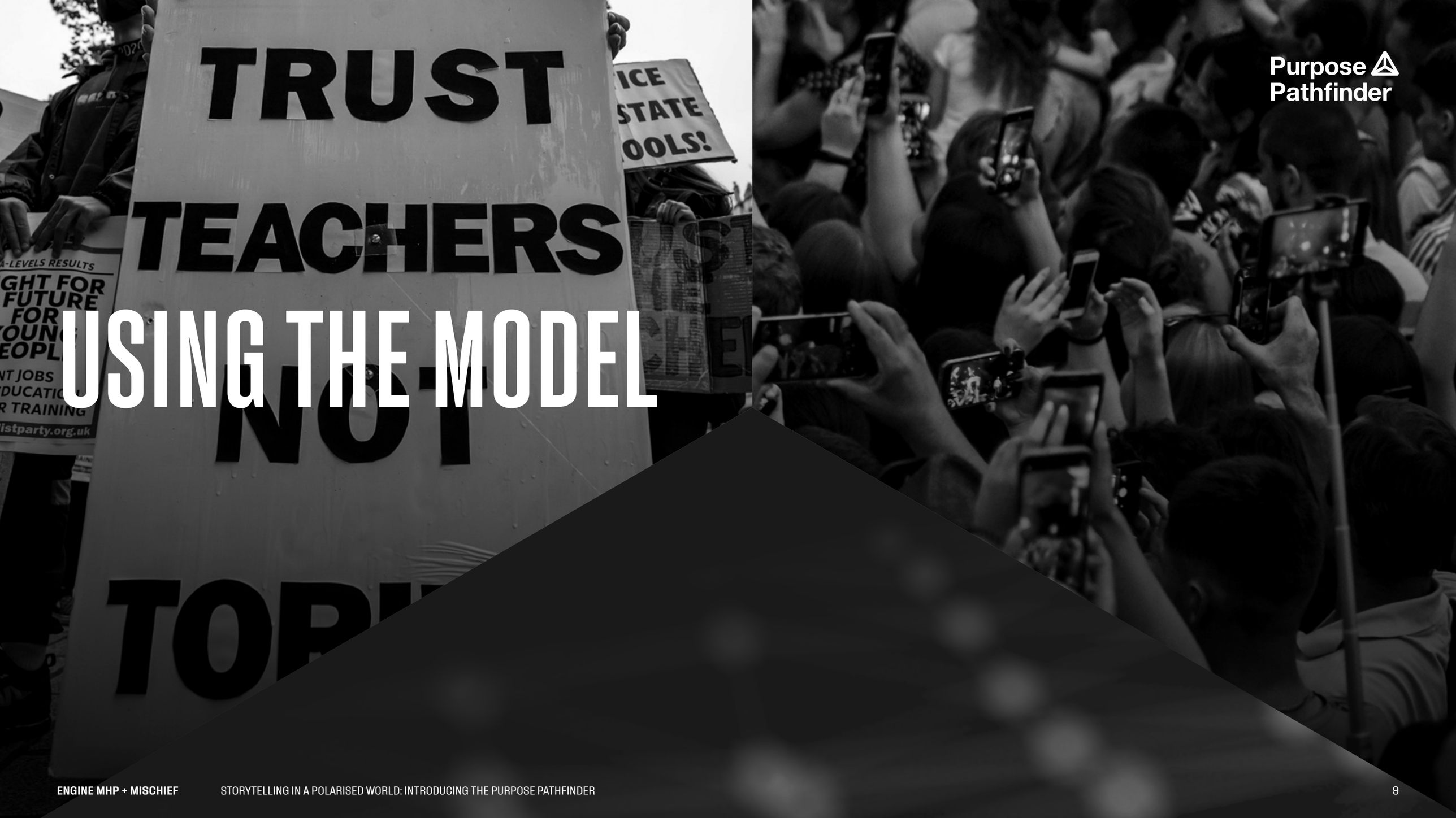
## COLLABORATION

+ Collaboration is about creating impactful partnerships, either to improve your products and services or the wider world. In the middle sit brands such as The National Lottery, which innovates for its customers to help them get rich but also helps wider society through its Good Causes initiatives.

## INNOVATION

+ Innovation is about solving problems, either for your customers or the common good. In between, brands may innovate both for customers and the greater good; for example, BP's purpose is to 'reimagine energy for people and the planet'.



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# USING THE MODEL

# THE PURPOSE PATHFINDER METHODOLOGY

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## STEP ONE: DEFINING TARGET AUDIENCES

**Identify target audiences or tribes based on characteristics and values.**

## STEP TWO: MAPPING AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS

**Score them against the Change, Community and Utility narrative routes based on attitudinal data.**

## STEP THREE: MEASURING BRAND PERFORMANCE

**Measure how brands perform against Change, Community and Utility by analysing mentions of purpose "power words".**

## STEP FOUR: GAP ANALYSIS AND DIRECTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**Identify where the most significant gaps are between audience expectations and brand performance, and create campaigns to fix them.**

# STEP ONE: **DEFINING TARGET AUDIENCES**

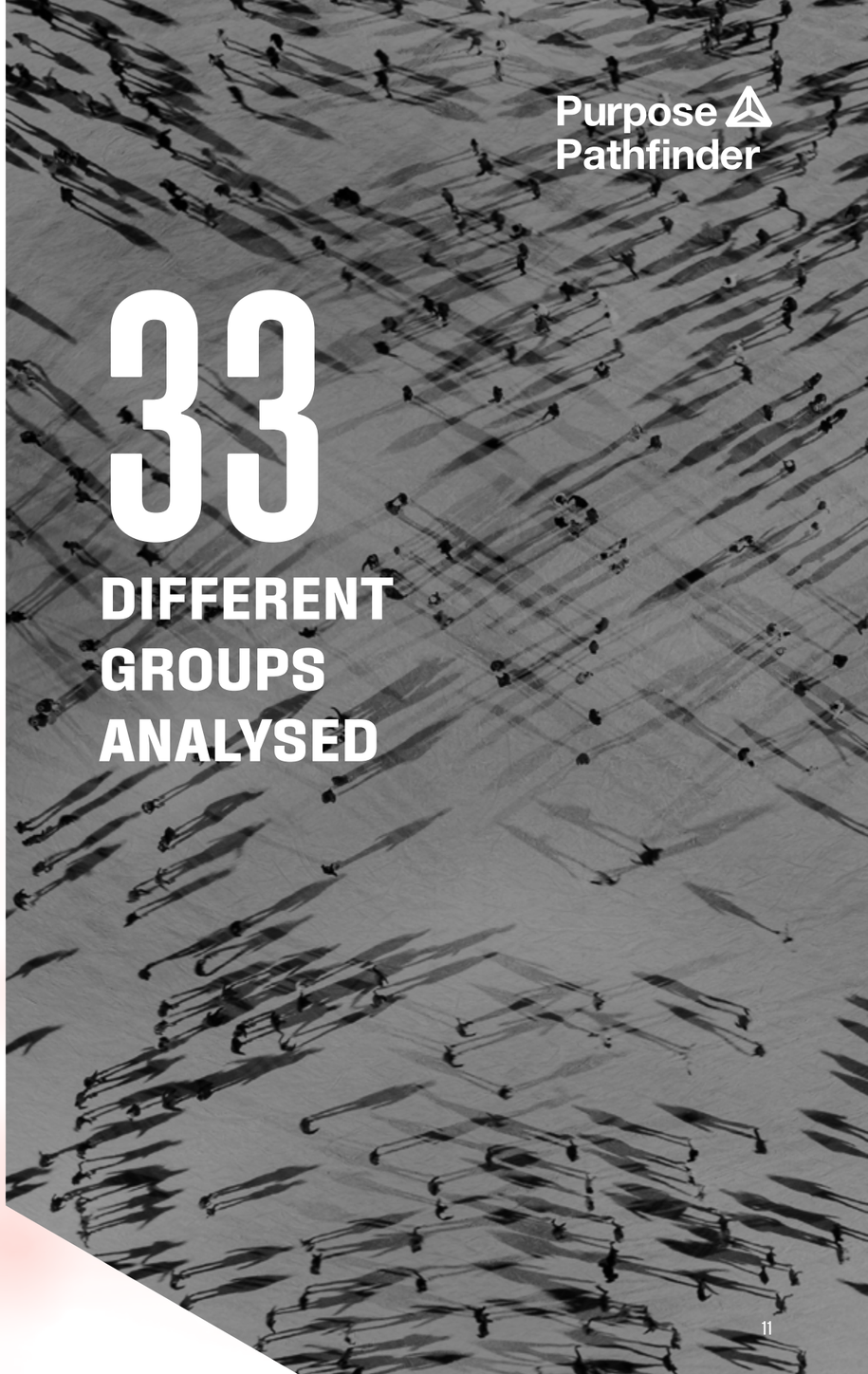
**It's crucial that brands approach communications problems with a clear understanding of who their audiences are, what they value and the messages they are receptive to.**

To help clients identify target audiences, our strategy team uses resources such as Mintel and TGI. However, we also use values-based segmentation from More in Common's seminal Britain's Choice report, which identifies seven tribes* of people in the UK.

In total, we have data for 33 different audience groups within the Purpose Pathfinder model. These include consumers segmented by age, gender, region and voting behaviour, as well as 'informed publics' and C-suite executives, SMEs, micro-businesses and self-employed people. We can also create bespoke audience profiles using a combination of any of these factors.

Where a more niche audience group needs profiling, we work with clients to conduct new research to profile them.

*View the More in Common tribes in **Appendix (a)**



# STEP TWO: **MAPPING AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS**

**To understand audience expectations and map them against the narrative routes, we use our proprietary nationally-representative study conducted by YouGov, in which people answered a number of attitudinal questions about polarisation and what they want from brands. Scores are awarded based on particular responses.**

**CHANGE:** support for brand activism and how it impacts purchase decisions; support for campaign groups; participation in social movements.

**COMMUNITY:** expectations of business to support community initiatives; belief in a united Britain; the extent to which they believe people look out for one another.

**UTILITY:** receptiveness to product messaging rather than social impact messaging; prioritisation of individual concerns over wider society; optimism about personal prosperity.

Using this information, we award each audience group a comparative percentage score against each narrative route.

The result is a thorough understanding of the narrative route and purpose messaging that will resonate best with different audiences.

# STEP THREE: MEASURING BRAND PERFORMANCE

**To identify how brands 'show up' against their target audiences' expectations, we use data analytics across owned, earned and shared channels to see how frequently a brand is associated with 'power words' related to each narrative route.**

The power words were selected in collaboration with our Networked Age experts (including journalists, politicians, social media influencers and corporate decisionmakers) and were based on natural language patterns.

Using a combination of Google Site Search and social media listening software, we're able to see how frequently a brand appears alongside the power words in editorial and social media, and on its own website.

We completed foundation benchmarking of 100 leading products and organisations, enabling us to award comparative percentage scores to brands for each narrative route, in the same way that we do with audiences.

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**1-100**

**BRAND SCORE FOR EACH NARRATIVE ROUTE**

# STEP FOUR: GAP ANALYSIS AND DIRECTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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**In the final stage, we identify where gaps exist between a brand's performance and its audiences' expectations. We then create narratives and campaigns to fix them, using additional qualitative research with audiences where required.**

## Example (a): A brand wanted to target a younger demographic

In this example, the biggest gap was on the Change axis. We worked with the client to create a purpose campaign which championed issues important to young people.

## Example (b): A brand wanted to target Progressive Activists without alienating existing customers

Moving up the Change axis would have taken the brand away from its current users (Loyal Nationalists). Instead, we needed to move along the route where audiences converge (Community).

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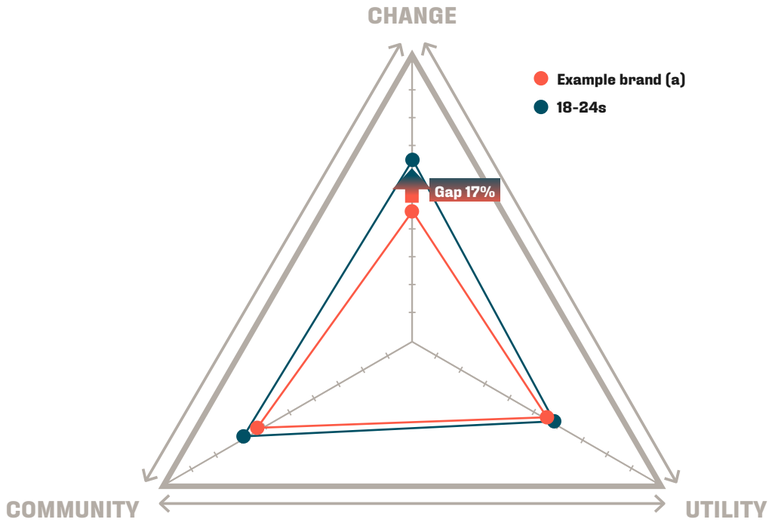
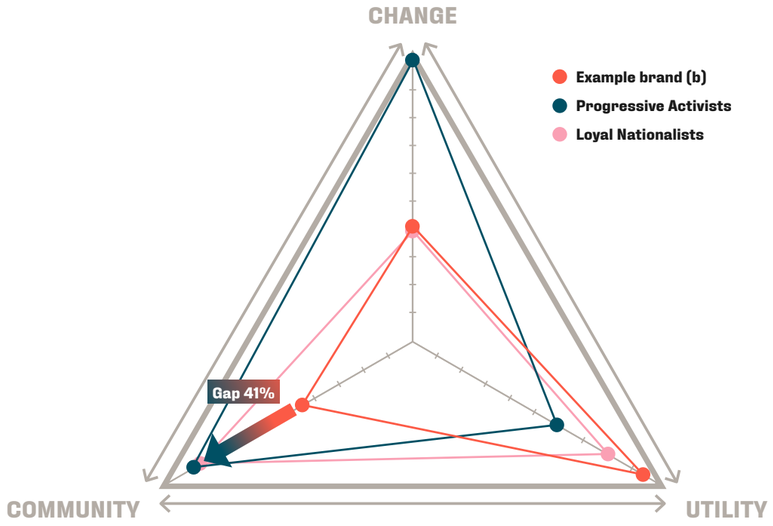
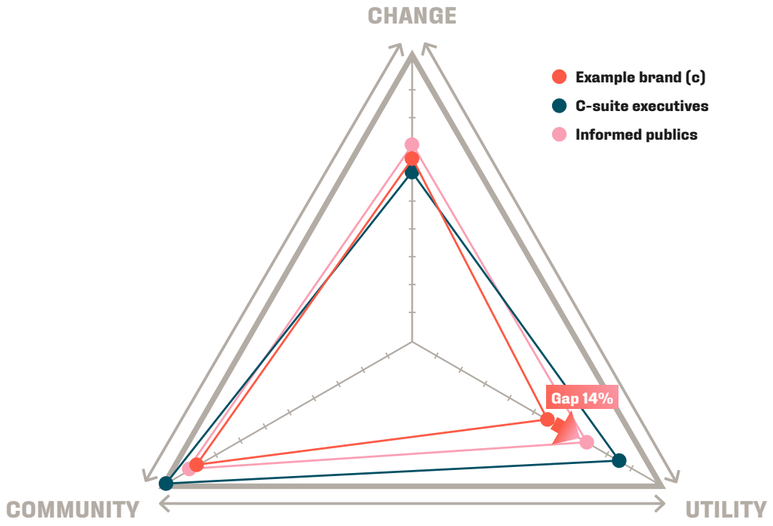
## Example (c): A brand wanted to improve its reputation among C-suite execs and informed publics

To appeal to both audiences, the brand needed to narrow the gap on the Utility axis and demonstrate its innovation to solve customer problems.

Full case studies in **Appendix (b)**



# WHEN IT COMES TO PURPOSE, PASSIONATE PEOPLE SHOUT LOUDEST BUT THERE ARE OTHERS TO LISTEN TO

**Among all the challenges that the last 12 months have presented, one of the largest for PR and comms people has been knowing how to advise clients or colleagues on brand responses to emerging and visible social movements. Speak up and risk a backlash for hypocrisy or unnecessarily politicising consumer experiences, or stay quiet and risk accusations for being complicit in the problem.**

The best answer to the question "should we show our support for this cause?" is to ask two further ones: "Do we have anything meaningful to say?", swiftly followed by "who are we saying it to?". Without clear answers to both of these, brands should be careful about putting their heads above the parapet. And that's before they consider the credibility and authenticity test – will they be taken seriously, even if they do speak out?

Yet despite these considerations, there is growing pressure on organisations to go beyond doing 'good' things, and to be actively involved in social justice movements and causes. This is being led by a relatively small – but very vocal and very influential – tribe that More in Common calls 'Progressive Activists', which make up approximately 13% of the population.

Progressive brand activism is not a new concept, but conversation around it is getting louder and more frequent. There has been a 477% spike in media mentions since 2019, and it's something that's now discussed in high-profile, international titles such as Vogue and Forbes.

Progressive activism is right for some brands, such as Patagonia, but for others – in fact, most – it isn't. A major consideration is the audience.

Our analysis of audiences for the Purpose Pathfinder model emphasises the disparity. On the Change axis – the narrative route linked to activism – audience scores range from 31% to 100%, with a 69% gap. On the Community and Utility axes, the gaps are 27% and 40% respectively.

This is not to say that audiences don't want brands to treat people well, use sustainable practices and make a positive contribution to society – all of these traits are now almost universally expected. However, there is a fundamental difference between social purpose and progressive activism: one is about living and breathing positive values, the other is about campaigning for political or social change.

It might be fashionable to be in the latter camp but it's not always right.

**Sam Holl**
Director

# APPENDICES

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# APPENDIX (A) - MORE IN COMMON'S SEVEN TRIBES OF BRITAIN

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**Progressive Activists (13% of the population)**
A vocal group for whom politics is at the core of their identity, and who seek to correct the historic marginalisation of groups based on their race, gender, sexuality, wealth and other forms of privilege. They are politically-engaged, critical, opinionated, frustrated, cosmopolitan, and environmentally conscious.

**Civic Pragmatists (13% of the population)**
A group that cares about others, at home and abroad, who are turned off by the divisiveness of politics. They are charitable, concerned, exhausted, community-minded, open to compromise, and socially liberal.

**Disengaged Battlers (12% of the population)**
A group that feels that they are just keeping their heads above water, and who blame the system for its unfairness. They are tolerant, insecure, disillusioned, disconnected, overlooked, and socially liberal.

**Established Liberals (12% of the population)**
A group that has done well and means well towards others, but also sees a lot of good in the status quo. They are comfortable, privileged, cosmopolitan, trusting, confident, and pro-market.

**Loyal Nationalists (17% of the population)**
A group that is anxious about the threats facing Britain and those facing themselves. They are proud, patriotic, tribal, protective, threatened, aggrieved, and frustrated about the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

**Disengaged Traditionalists (18% of the population)**
A group that values a well-ordered society, prides itself in hard work, and wants strong leadership that keeps people in line. They are self-reliant, ordered, patriotic, tough-minded, suspicious, and disconnected.

**Backbone Conservatives (15% of the population)**
A group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future outside of Europe, and who keenly follow the news, mostly via traditional media sources. They are nostalgic, patriotic, sturdy, proud, secure, confident, and relatively engaged with politics.

# APPENDIX (B) - PURPOSE PATHFINDER CASE STUDIES

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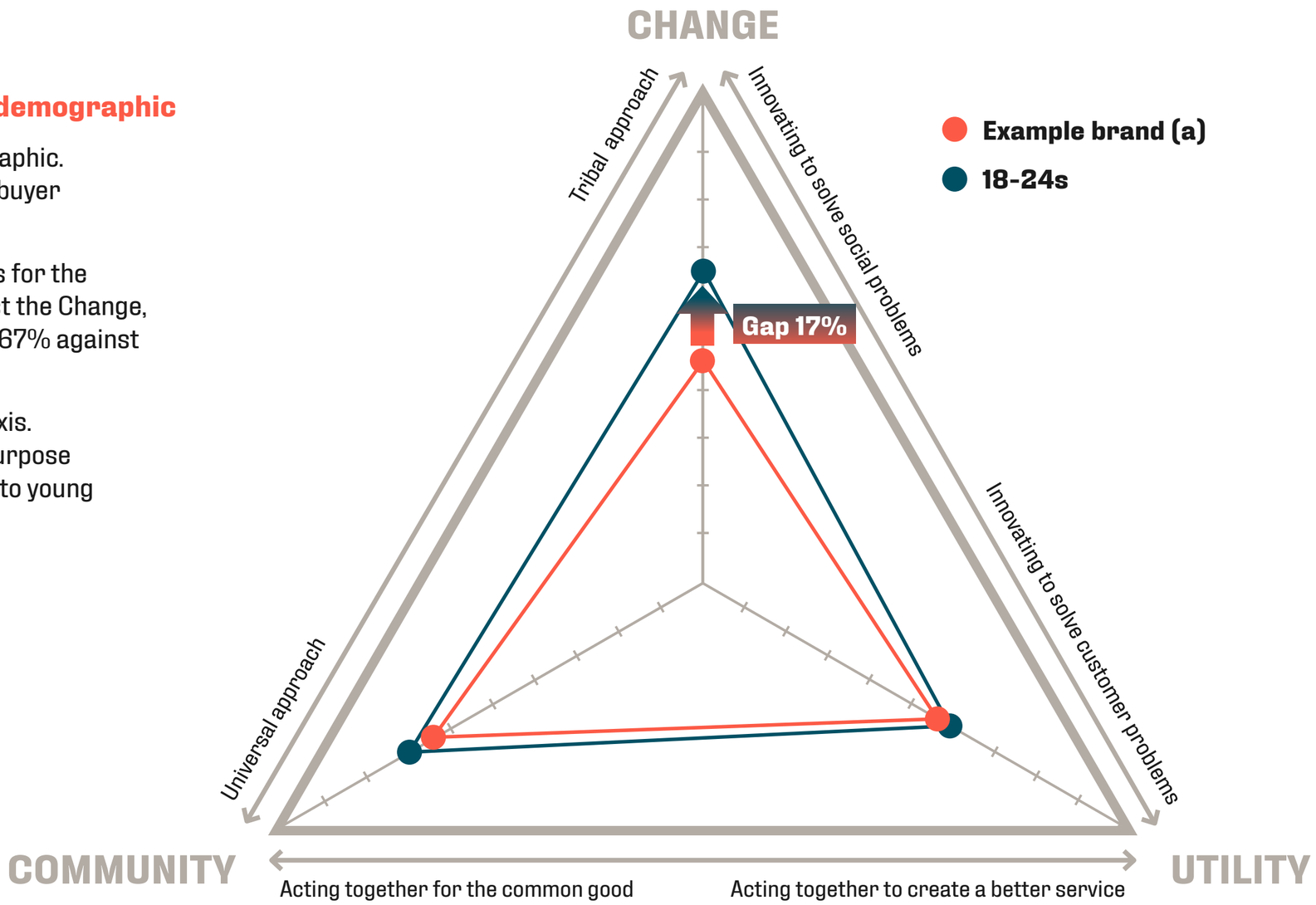
## Example (a): A brand wanted to target a younger demographic

A client approached us to help them target a younger demographic. With an ageing customer base, engaging a new generation of buyer was key to the organisation's long-term prosperity.

On the populated Purpose Pathfinder, we could see the scores for the 18-24 audience were 65%, 81% and 68% respectively, against the Change, Community and Utility axes. The brand scored 48%, 76% and 67% against the same headings.

We could see the biggest 'gap' – of 17% – was on the Change axis. Our recommendation to the client was therefore to adopt a purpose positioning which saw it take on issues and causes important to young people, and innovate to solve these social problems.



# APPENDIX (B) - PURPOSE PATHFINDER CASE STUDIES

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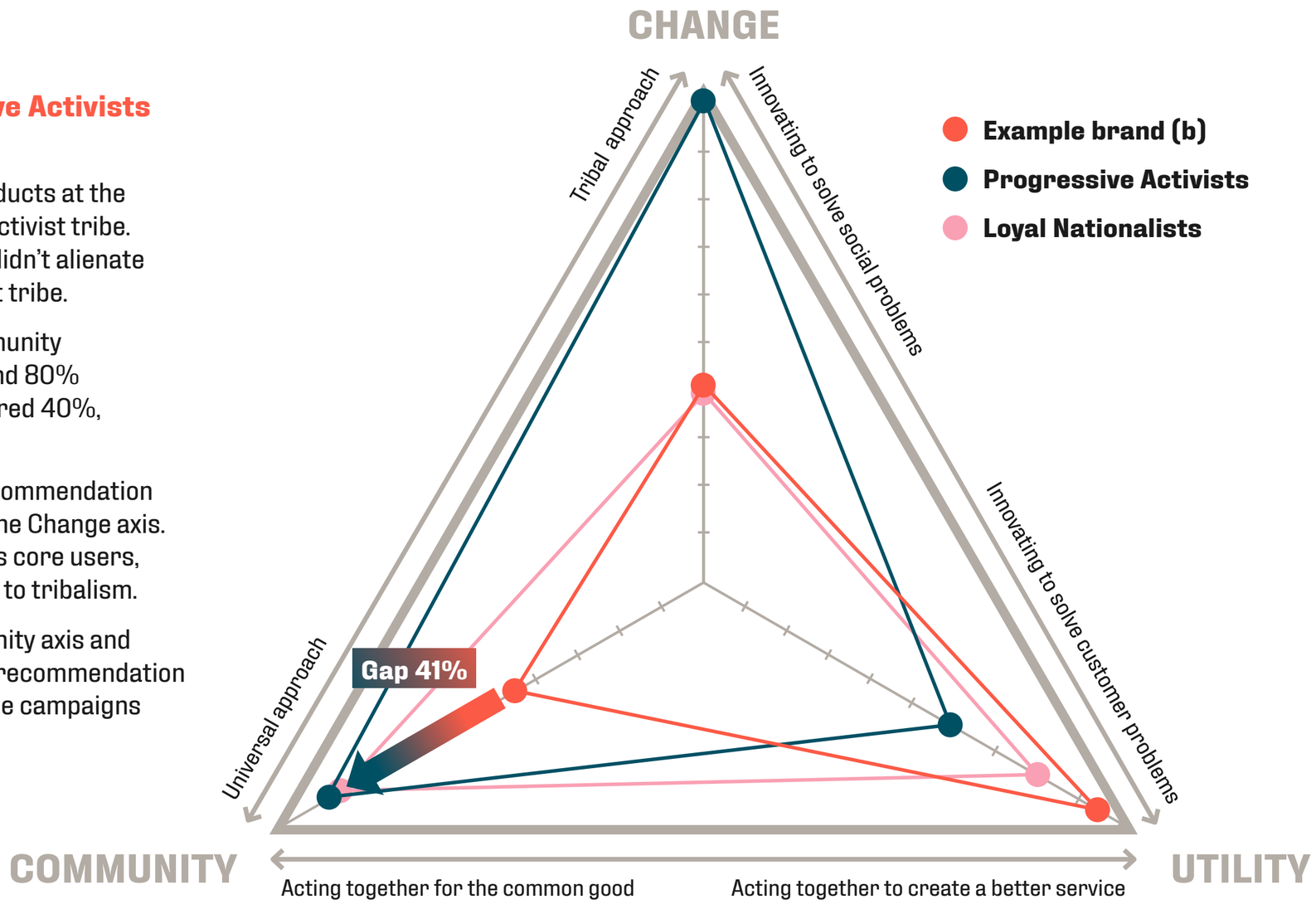
## Example (b): A brand wanted to target Progressive Activists without alienating existing customers

In this example, the client identified an opportunity to sell products at the more expensive end of its range to the affluent Progressive Activist tribe. However, it wanted to target this new audience in a way that didn't alienate its existing customers, who are largely in the Loyal Nationalist tribe.

Progressive Activists score 100% for Change, 89% for Community and 60% for Utility, but Loyal Nationalists score 39%, 87% and 80% respectively. To make things more complicated, the client scored 40%, 44% and 95% against the different axes.

If the client were just targeting Progressive Activists, our recommendation would have been to create purpose campaigns to move it up the Change axis. Doing this, though, would take the brand further away from its core users, who are not aligned with Progressive Activists when it comes to tribalism.

Instead, we saw that the audiences converged on the Community axis and that this is where the brand also had to make up ground. Our recommendation was therefore to close the Community gap and create purpose campaigns built around universal social change.



# APPENDIX (B) - PURPOSE PATHFINDER CASE STUDIES

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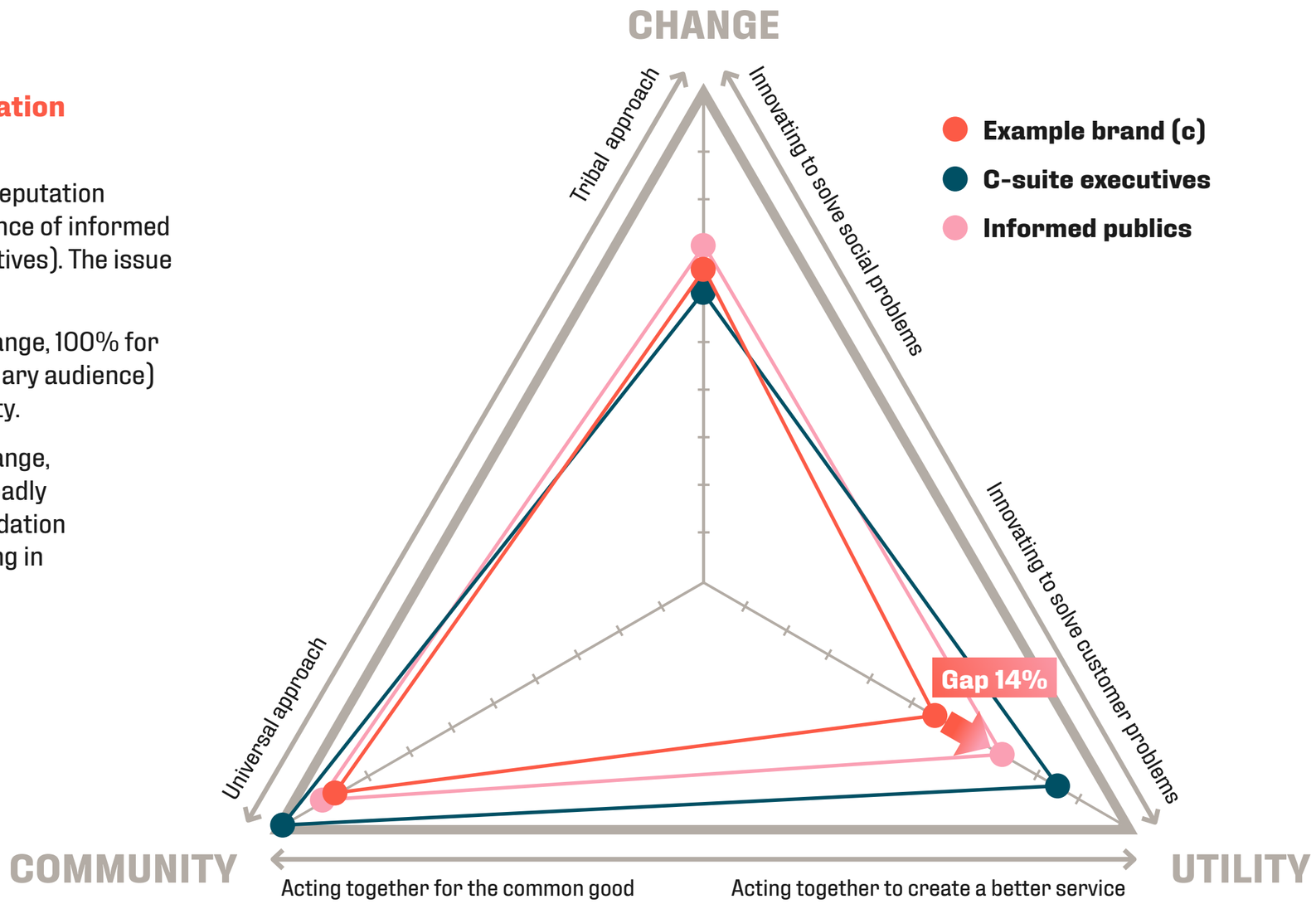
## Example (c): A brand wanted to improve its reputation among C-suite execs and informed publics

A technology business was suffering from a poor corporate reputation among C-suite executives and, more broadly, among an audience of informed publics (in this case, the families and friends of C-suite executives). The issue was damaging its B2B sales pipeline.

C-suite executives (the primary audience) score 59% for Change, 100% for Community, and 86% for Utility. Informed publics (the secondary audience) score 71% for Change, 92% for Community and 70% for Utility.

Our analysis of the brand revealed that it scored 64% for Change, 88% for Community and 56% for Utility. With the client in broadly the right ballpark for Change and Community, our recommendation was to look at a utilitarian purpose positioning, around working in partnership with customers to make their lives easier.



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## ABOUT ENGINE MHP + MISCHIEF

**ENGINE MHP + Mischief is a team of 200 specialists combining behavioural science, influencer strategy and industry expertise to solve complex communications challenges. We are built for The Networked Age, a landscape discussed and uncovered in our 2018 study in partnership with University College London's Affective Brain Lab. It's a world that is increasingly interconnected, tribal, sceptical and activist, and this leads to rising polarisation.**

**mhpc.com/networkedage**

**Get in touch**
To find out more about how the Purpose Pathfinder can work for you, please contact Sam Holl, at **purpose@mhpmischief.com**

## CONTACT


020 3128 8100
contactus@mhpc.com

60 Great Portland Street
London, W1W 7RT

mhpc.com
@mhpc

mischiefpr.com
@mischiefpr

ENGINE
mhp mischief