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IBM iX Studio Transformation

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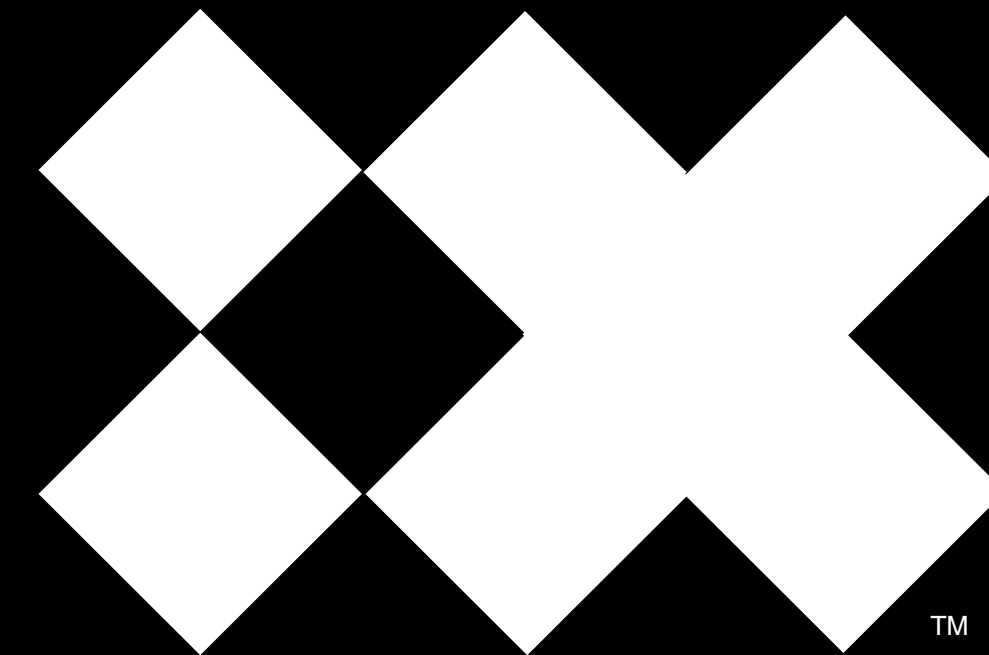
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Situation

When I joined the IBM iX studio, there was A Design team consisting of 36 primarily junior designers. The studio was not performing great and had a utilization score of 64% (which is low)

The studio did not have a good reputation within IBM Benelux, mainly because of the inexperienced team.

I replaced a studio lead that had moved to another part of the IBM organization. The previous studio lead had primarily focused on hard skills, which significantly impacted the team's culture.



Task

My task as the new Studio Lead was to bring the studio to a higher level, Increase utilization and build out the design practice. Together with my manager (Managing Director IBM Groningen), I set the following subgoals:

- Define Organizational Structure
- Forster Talent Growth
- Define the way of working Groningen & Amsterdam
- Assure of Quality and Compliance



Approach

After setting the goals, I drafted a plan of approach to start with an exploration phase followed by a build and an iteration phase.

Phase 1 - Laying the groundwork

- Assess current situation
- Define Career paths
- Introduce new rituals (Demo's & Critiques)
- Develop transformation plan

Phase 2 - Raze the bar and strengthen relationships

- Hiring senior designers
- Define the way of working Groningen & Amsterdam

Phase 3 - Fine-tune & Iterate

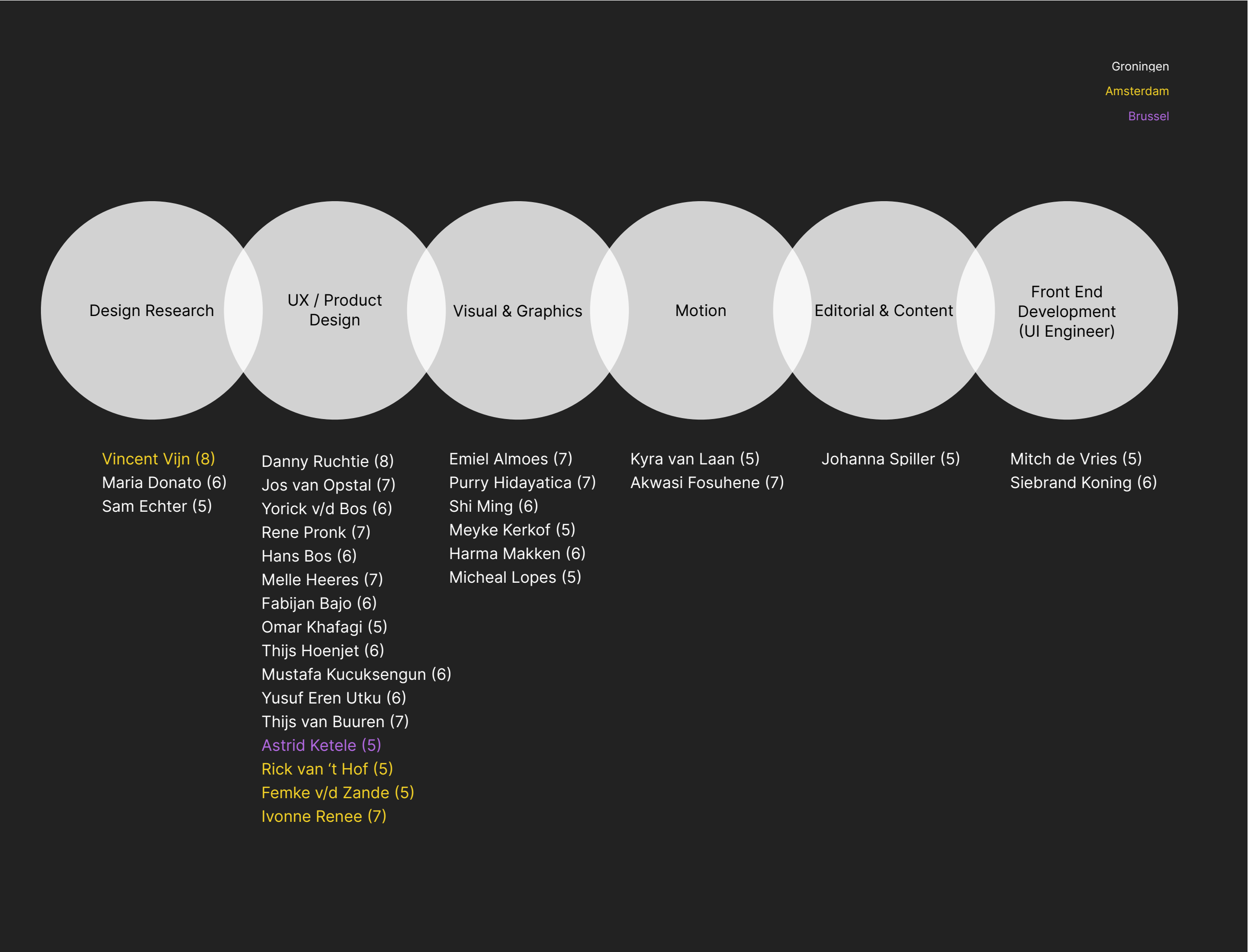


Assess Current Situation

I joined a team of 30 designers (Design Research, UX / Product design, Visual designers, Motion designers, editorial and UI engineers). Besides the designers, there were six trainees who did not have dedicated roles yet.

Most of them were put on projects based on availability, and the designers in Amsterdam barely had any contact with the team in Groningen.

There was not a lot of knowledge sharing between the designers, and the people were primarily working on their own islands.



Skills workshop

To get a clear overview of the skill levels within the team, I asked everybody on the team individually to score each other's hard and soft skills.

This gave me a clear picture of the state of the team but also a view of the individual's self-image.

In this grid, the UX designers score higher on soft skills than the visual designers. A couple of designers are not achieving what is expected from their level. Some exceeded what was expected from them.

Great input for one on ones and personal development plans.



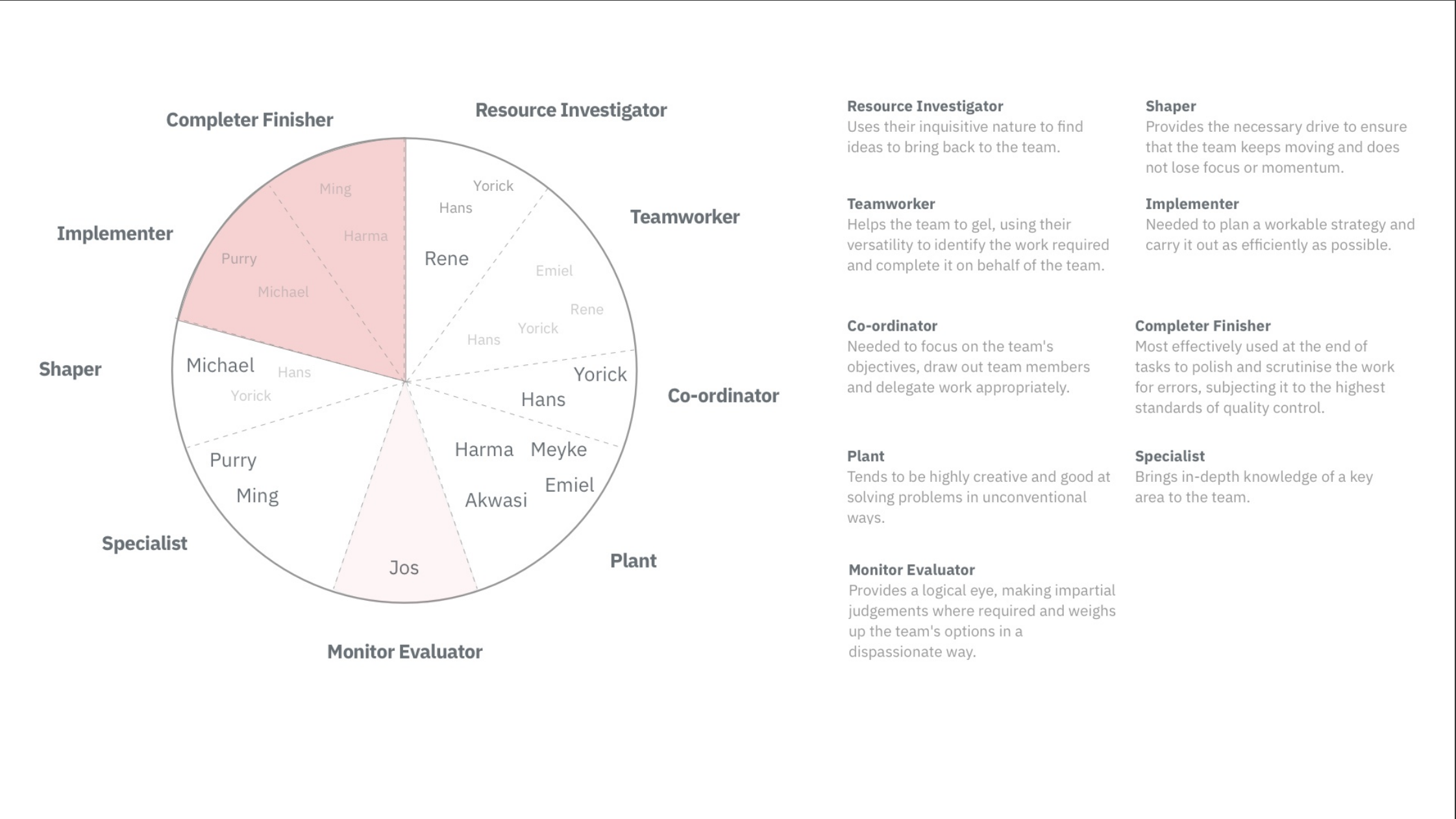
Personality workshop

I gave a workshop to better understand where people stand in their careers. I asked the team members to score themselves on the 9 Team Roles of Belbin to understand the team dynamics.

An ideal team structure has a good mix of all nine roles. What stood out was that the studio did have a lot of so-called Plants.

Getting the right personality became one of the requirements for our hiring plan.

It also was input for our sourcing to pair designers for specific projects.



Studio Transformation Plan

After I assessed the team and its needs, I started drafting a Transformation plan focusing on strategy, operations, team, and the business.

I set clear goals for the studio and asked people on the team how they thought they could help me to achieve these goals.

I introduced new rituals, like critiques, retrospectives, huddles, and invited guest speakers from agencies and other IBM departments (demos).

Strategy

- ☐ Define Vision and Goals
- ☐ Measure Performance

Operations

- ☐ Enable Knowledge Exchange
- ☐ Assure of Quality and Compliance
- ☐ Define way of working

Business

- ☐ Develop Design Culture
- ☐ Promote Design Capabilities
- ☐ Build Design Reputation

Team

- ☐ Develop Team Culture
- ☐ Plan & scale Staffing Demand
- ☐ Forster Talent Growth
- ☐ Manage External Partners

Strengthen Relationships

We started inviting different practice leads and key account managers to our studio to show them our recent work to inspire them and hopefully attract new projects and opportunities.

I started promoting and stimulating Designers to chase opportunities while working with clients.

It resulted in more interesting work, more involvement in the team, and a greater sense of responsibility.

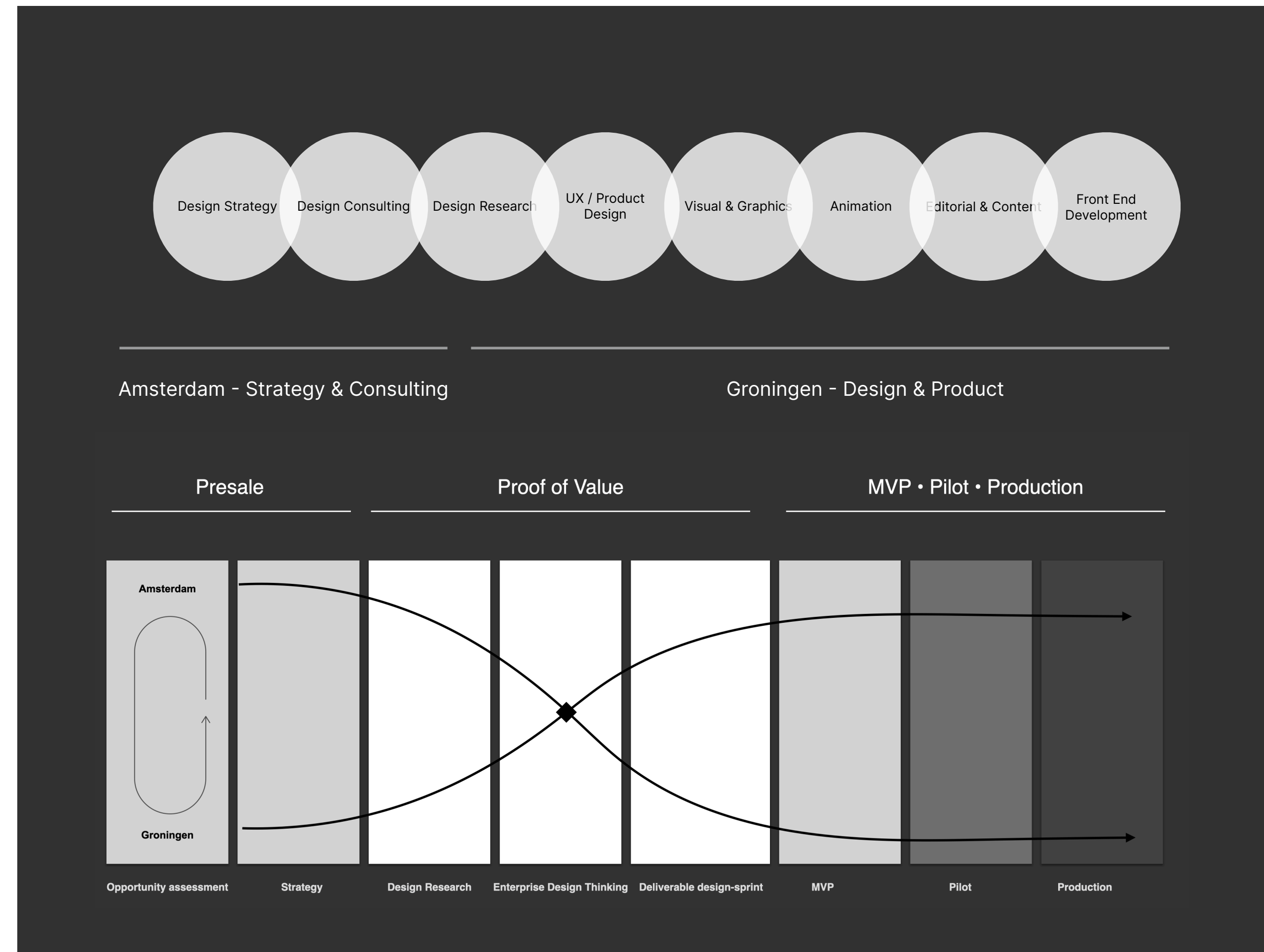


Define the way of working Groningen & Amsterdam

Most designers were located in the Groningen office, but some designers were hired in Amsterdam as consultants.

The designers from Groningen and Amsterdam barely worked together, and there was no clear plan to improve this situation.

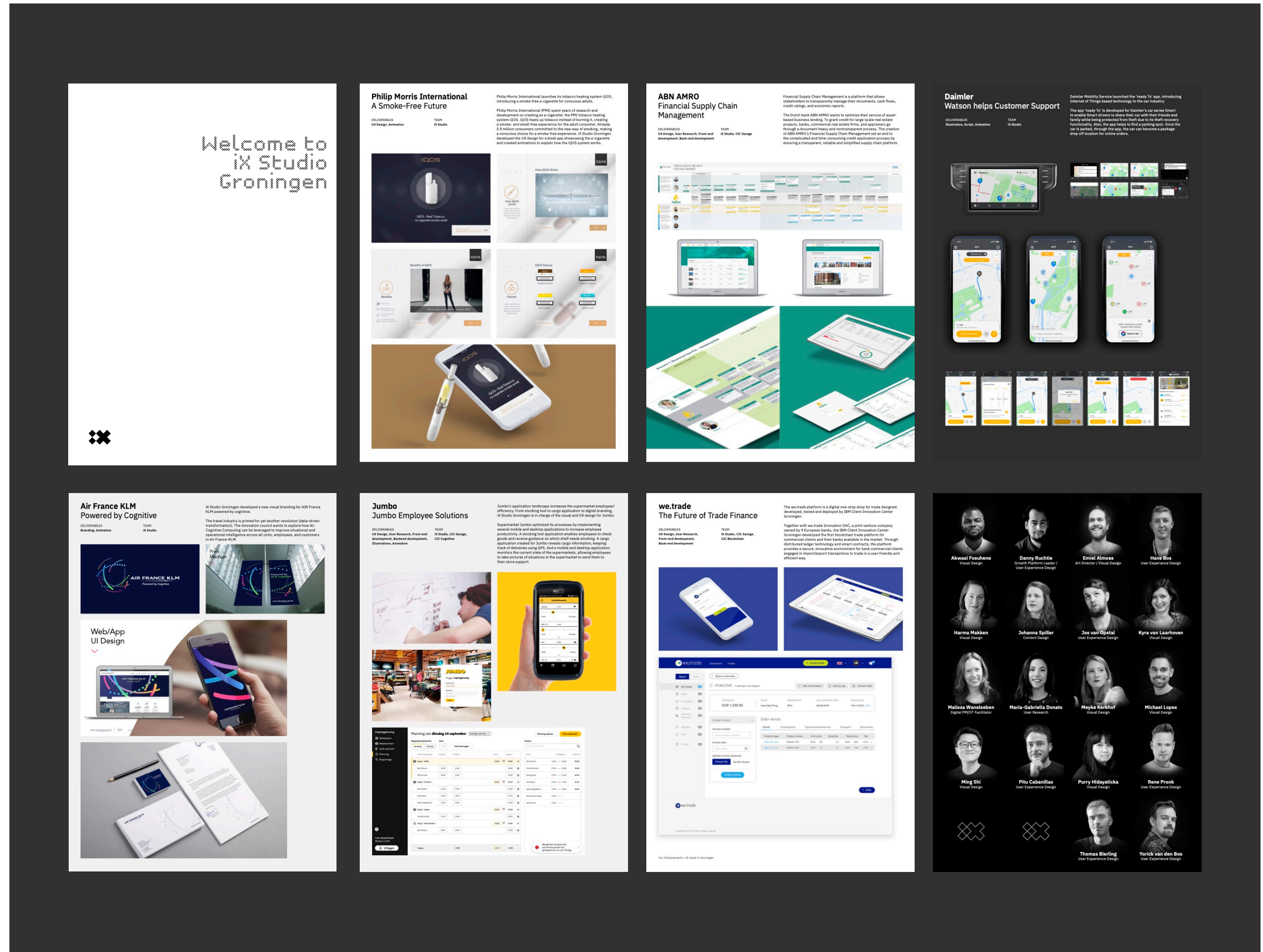
I created a plan to hire more consultants and researchers in Amsterdam (closer to the clients). Once a client had “landed,” the Groningen team would take over the project.



Build Design Reputation

We started working on a studio portfolio and showreels to share new work with our IBM GBS colleagues to let them know what the studio was capable of.

We also created a quarterly magazine. The magazine highlighted the different projects the studio was involved with, and it gave the account managers from GBS a podium to show off their work internally.



Invite Global Design Leaders

The transformation started to draw more attention from other teams, allowing us to invite more global leaders to our office.

These leaders gave presentations about new developments around design within IBM, making the studio even more relevant for our GBS partners and their clients.



The Results

- ✓ I completed the first two phases of the transformation plan.
- ✓ The Studio got an excellent reputation within IBM Benelux
- ✓ The utilization score moved from 64% to 92%
- ✓ I got promoted to Growth Platform Leader, not only overseeing the studio but also the mobile, salesforce, and digital strategy practices.
- ✓ We hired an additional 30 people, almost doubling the team.
- ✓ We increased the production quality, and people felt more ownership of the projects they worked on.

My strength

- I'm analytical & strategic.
- I'm people-oriented
- I'm able to connect with people
- I give trust and ownership to my team members.

A strategic mindset with an eye for the individual

