



UNCERTAIN

TWELVE ARCHETYPES TO UNDERSTAND HOW WE WILL
INTERPRET THE NOW AND NAVIGATE THE FUTURE

TIMES

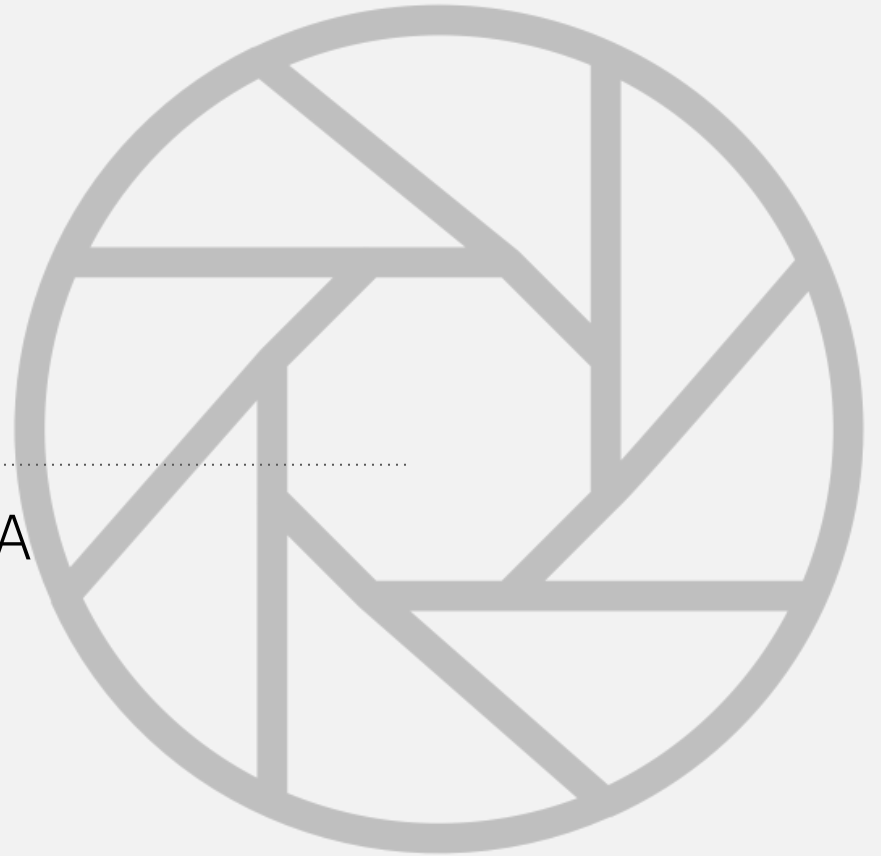


Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
ARCHETYPES AND APPLICATION	8
EXAMPLE APPLICATIONS	42
METHODOLOGY	49
CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	67

Uncertain Times

DEVELOPING A LENS TO VIEW A
WORLD TOUCHED BY COVID





Has Uncertainty Changed Us?

In advertising we are always attempting to create personal identification in the mass, speaking to a human experience and creating roles for our brands to forge deeper connections. The Pandemic, however, has affected more than just our collective safety, supply chains and lifestyles - it has also exposed us all to an acute, long-term stressor. Our networks, systems and communities - personal, professional and societal - were all challenged as a result, and our responses were vast and varied.

Since February 2020, we have been forced to become nimble and adaptive in how we communicate and connect. At every stage, however, it became difficult to anticipate how people would react. Whether the creative was intended to be positive and celebratory or cautious and reassuring, **we saw reactions that rejected and embraced both, and wanted to gain a better understanding of why these polarizing responses were occurring.**

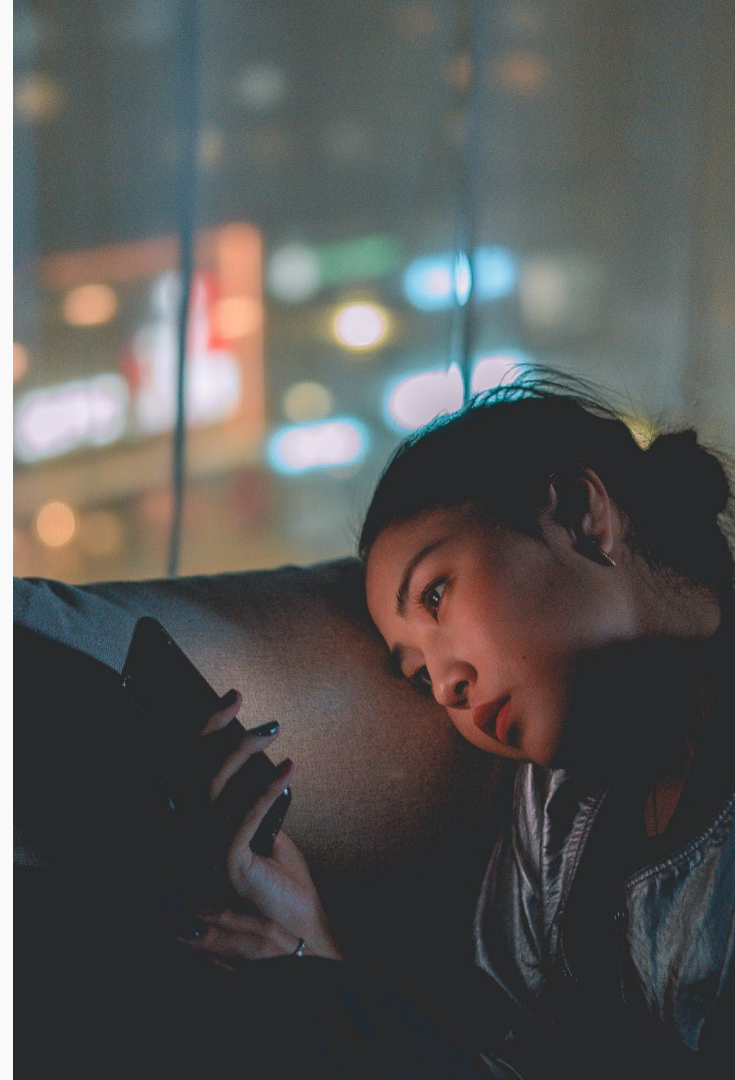




The Same Crisis – But Different Stressors

While anxiety and fear is a reasonable response to a global health crisis, **exposure to chronic stress has wide and varied impacts on our physical and mental health.** One such change is how it can contribute to our abilities to make decisions and take information in context. [In other words, long-term stress causes us to be less flexible and adaptive,](#) **which may mean that messages that we would normally ignore, or discount as not being meant for us take on new meanings;** insensitive, inaccurate and inappropriate in the channels where we are being reached.

The stress we all felt - and still feel - was [influenced by so many factors that it may prove to be difficult to generalize target demographics](#) and their potential responses to messaging for the foreseeable future. After all, **even families living in the same neighbourhood or colleagues at the same business** were all experiencing the Pandemic with a wide range of other contributing stressors, all to varying degrees.





Our Lives – and Selves – Have Changed

With emerging new variants and new challenges, **we have yet to truly enter into a post-Covid world**, and [consumer anxiety levels](#) show us that we cannot communicate as if we have entered the ‘After Times’.

Even at the peak of the crisis, [consumers didn’t believe that advertisers should cease communicating](#); only that they needed to acknowledge that life had changed, that we were making strides to take care of one another, and that [they had a practical understanding of life in Covid](#).

Now that we are slowly recovering we wanted to ask if it was possible to generalize those experiences and gain an understanding of their impacts so we could get closer to achieving what consumers have been asking of us over the past year and a half.

Practical solutions. Sensitive reflections. An understanding of their lives and their worries, needs and hopes for the future.





Before We Arrive in the After: Considering Who We Are Now

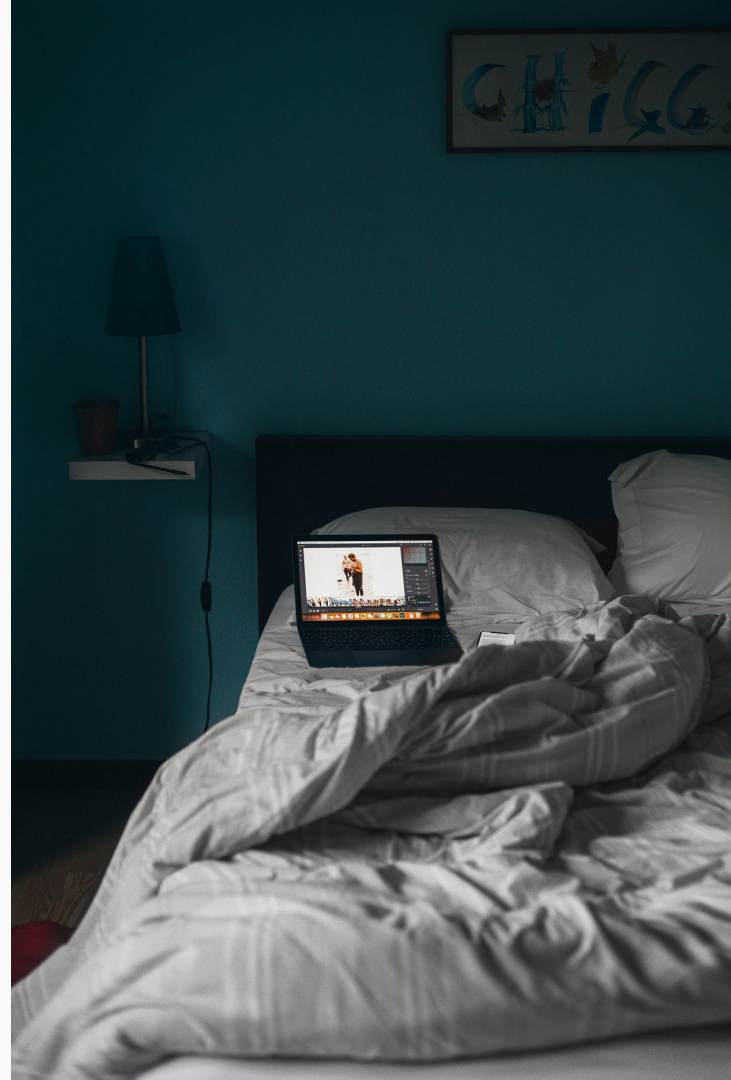
These archetypes aren't new targets; only a new lens to see the world through their eyes and to gain a deeper insight into what they are looking for now, and for the foreseeable future.

They were designed to be recognizable; that you can see your friends, family and peers in these narratives and relate to them.

They were created to prompt new solutions; we consulted with mental health professionals to gain a new perspective of what they value and need now.

They are intended only as a tool, and one that we hope is versatile and valuable as you develop new briefs and use your creativity to connect with consumers.

We may have framed the past year and a half as Uncertain Times, but the fact is that every time is uncertain - and that includes the After Times, whenever we may arrive there.



Archetypes and Application

TWELVE PERSPECTIVES TO
UNDERSTAND WHO WE ARE NOW



READY TO GO



STEP BY STEP



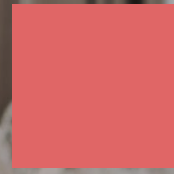
FULL STOP



Ready to Go



Step By Step

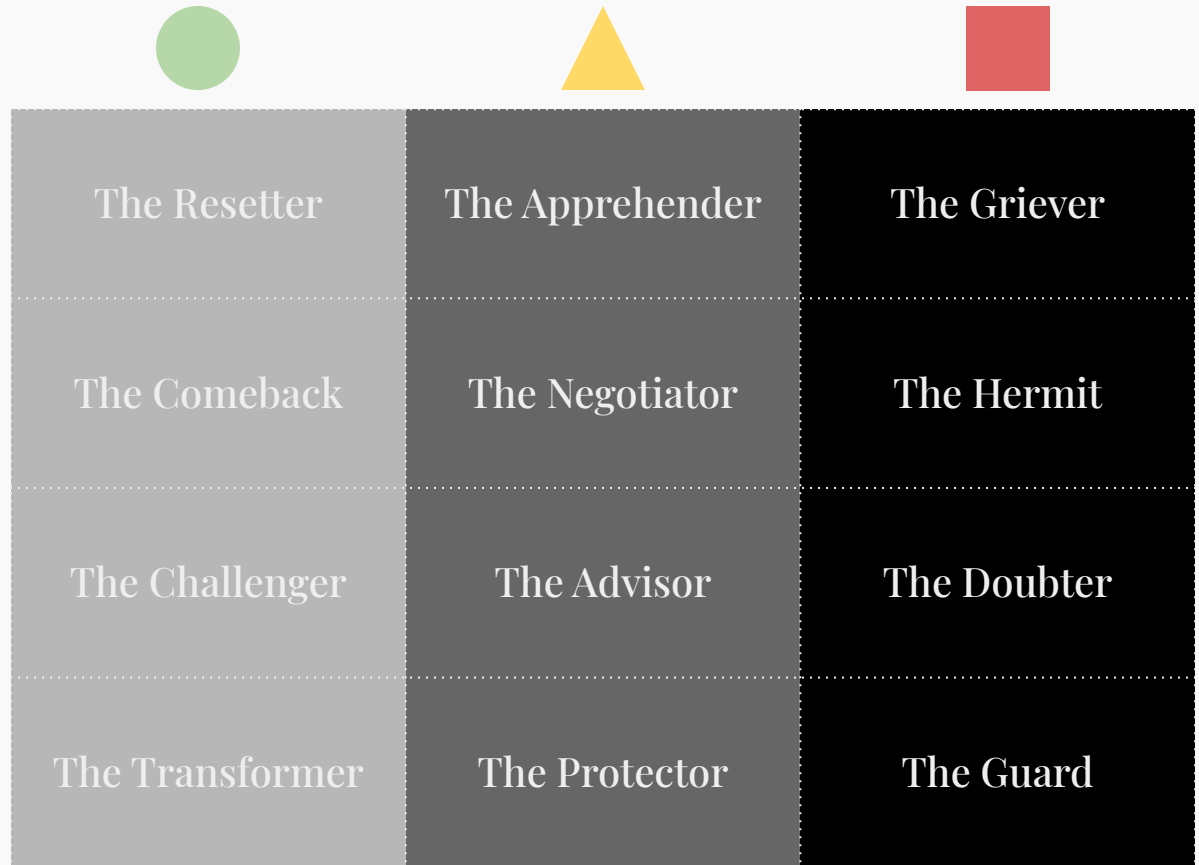


Full Stop



Our Uncertain Times Archetypes

These 12 high-level archetypes are meant to help us anticipate the needs, beliefs and barriers of the average North American as we begin to head into 'The After Times'. All this is knowing, of course, that we can't truly predict how we will react in the coming months or even years.





Our Lexicon

To help clarify our recommendations, we have included a high-level lexicon to reference when reviewing your archetype's suggested need state; please consider how your brand can speak to their targets or ideate to answer to these need states, and the role they can play.

EMPATHY	Expressions that reflect an understanding of their challenges, perspectives	PROGRESSION	Demonstrations of tangible change, implementing feedback
OPTIMISM	Expressions of hope, excitement and an impending better future	PLANNING	Demonstrations of future-thinking, laying the groundwork for recovery
AFFIRMATION	Reflection and validation of their emotional state, concerns and hopes	FREEDOM	Expressions of excitement and future plans without constraint
REASSURANCE	Demonstrations of protection to build trust and a sense of security	OPPORTUNITY	Considerations for creating a role or a space for the target to own
ACCEPTANCE	Demonstrations that reflect their new reality and emotions	SOLUTIONS	Leveraging brand's positioning or product to provide tangible solutions
ACTION	Providing targets with opportunities to contribute to recovery	EXPRESSION	Providing targets with opportunities or spaces to freely express themselves



The Uncertainty Lens

This tool - The Uncertainty Lens - is intended to be a way of approximating a generalization of something that is nearly impossible for us truly understand. Based on a simple UX approach to gaining target empathy, it can be layered on to your current target demographics.

The challenges our targets faced and how they transformed them are individual and intimate, and they aren't necessarily linked to specific incidents or losses, but we have attempted to create **twelve, high-level archetypes** that we believe are **trauma-sensitive** and will provide you with a way of estimating **what they need from brands** and **which messaging styles will connect with them** as a result of these changed perspectives and attitudes.





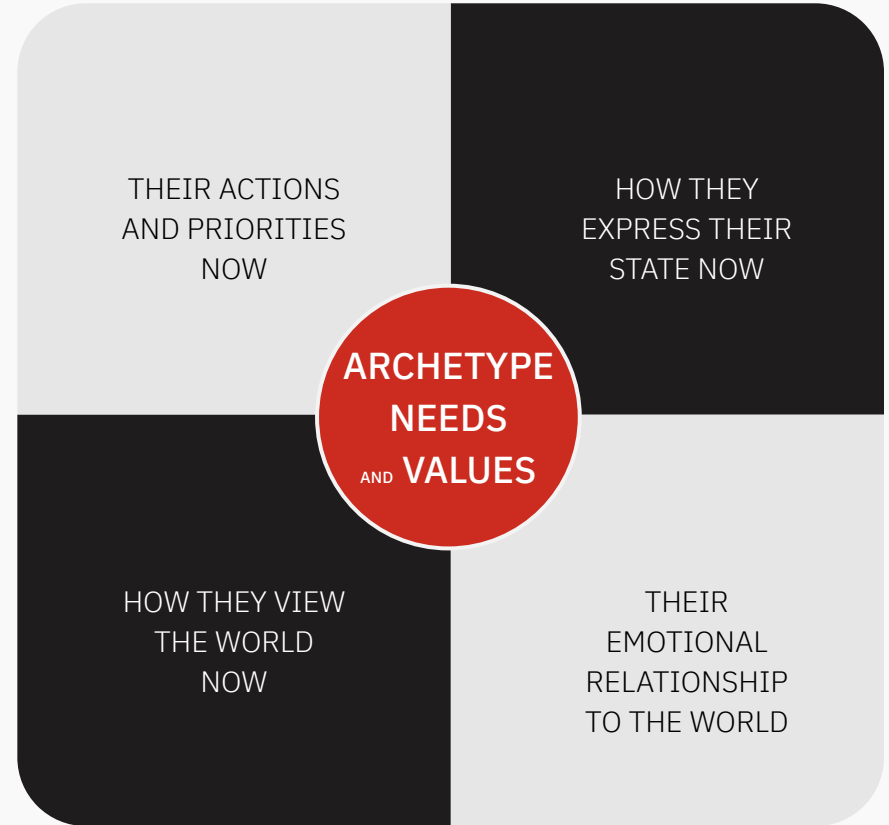
How To Use It

Create your target profiles as you would normally, with your preferred approach, or leverage your existing ones.

By reviewing more refined data, consider which After Times archetype(s) are most likely to apply to your target groups. These considerations may include, but aren't limited to, the following:

- Likelihood of unemployment, types of employment and ability to work from home
- Access to childcare, financial support or family support
- Current living arrangements, environmental factors
- Impact of illness through family, community and/or likelihood of personally contracting COVID-19

Rearticulate the existing statements with this specific understanding, and find overlap in the needs and values for your new target archetypes to determine the role your brand can play for them and how to consider communicating with them.





We have waited long enough to start living our New Normal.

According to recent surveys, approximately 20% of North American consumers **feel that we are too cautious**, that we aren't moving fast enough. Despite growing cases of the Delta Variant, [there has been high rates of single vaccinations across North America](#) and there are still persistent myths that COVID-19 was either created intentionally, or that [vaccines and other moves towards safety cannot be trusted](#).

Either way, there is a growing confidence that we can begin to adjust and move on, or return back to our previous world - albeit one that is still shaky, and still in the minority.

For the purpose of this project, we have chosen not to focus on those who believe that COVID-19 is not a threat, or that vaccinations are not necessary. This group instead comprises of those who could be considered **impatient to move forward, empowered to make their own decision, confident in their security** or feel that there is **no other alternative** than to move on; that the world has changed but **we need to adapt and continue looking forward**.

The Resetter: RECOVERY

After having their lives paused - or worse, completely upended - by the Pandemic, the Resetter wants to get everything back on track and return to the start.

They are looking for opportunity, and are focused on finishing their 'push' through the chaos so they can just make it out the other side, putting this behind them.





The Resetter

How to Spot Them: The pavement-pounders, the goal-oriented and the driven. They were set back and now they're prepared to regain what they lost. They were paused and now they are in fast forward.

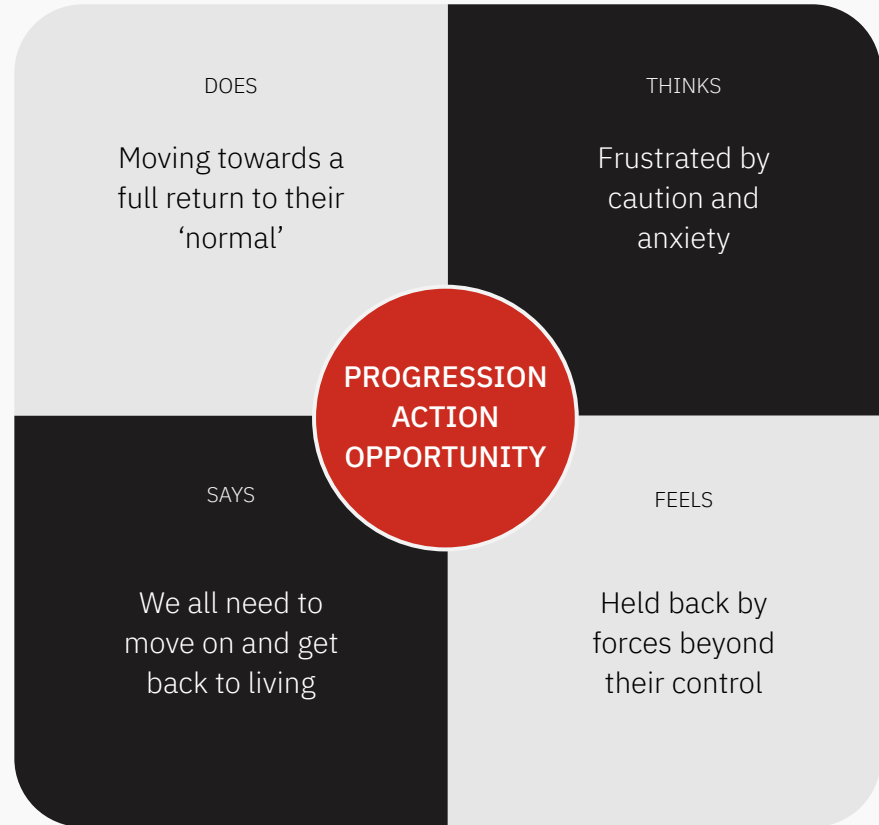
What They Want: To see indications of movement and growth, a sign that we are about to enter the After Times and they can move on. They are anxious to contribute to a return to normalcy.

What They Fear: That there is something wrong with them and what they want. They see the concerns of others and feel that their desire to move forward is calloused, and their choices are insensitive.

Challenge: Tempered optimism may be intended to help them cope with setbacks, but will cause them to feel like we aren't collectively working hard enough to recover.

Group Considerations:

- Doing, not just saying
- Show every step forward
- Make space for expression
- Validate their feelings



The Comeback: EMERGENCE

They took this as an opportunity - not that they're opportunistic - to work on themselves, and now they're set to take this momentum into the coming months and leave boredom behind.

Excited to resume a more normal pace, they're considering what habits they think are important to maintain, and what needs to stay in the past.





The Comeback

How to Spot Them: The hobbyists, the hyper-productive and the enthusiastic. They have taken stock and rearranged their priorities. They underwent transformation small and large.

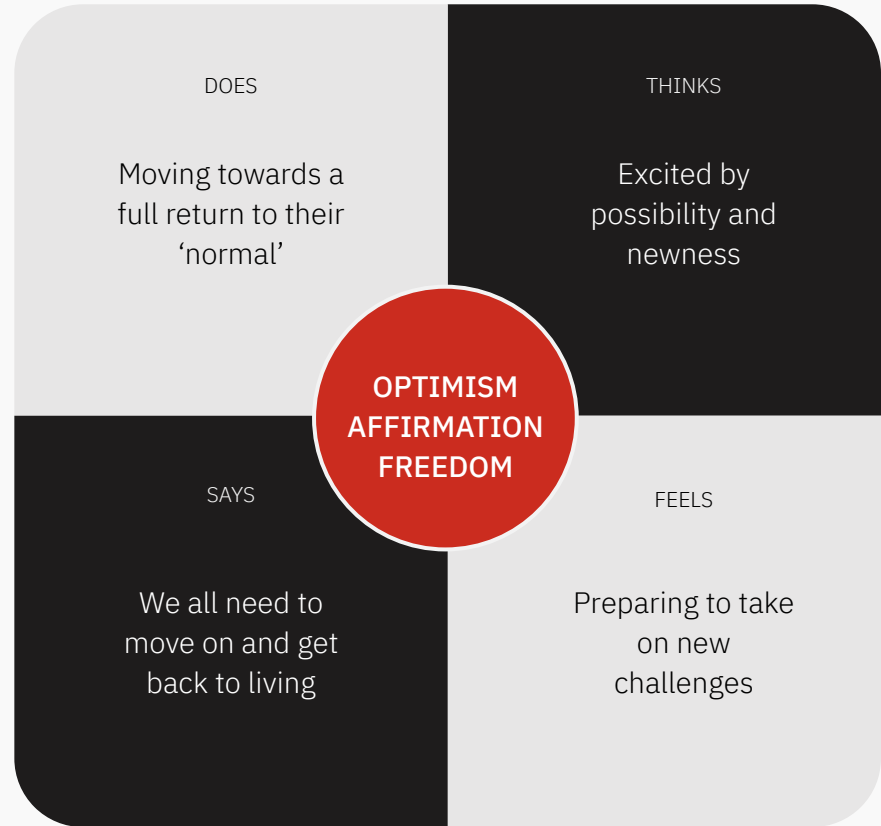
What They Want: An opportunity to move into the After Times with a new mindset and a healthier perspective. They are more future-focused than ever before and prepared to take it on.

What They Fear: That they are no longer relatable to their friends, family and colleagues. They have a sense of pride that they want to share, but worry that they are insensitive to the feelings of others.

Challenge: They tie a sense of identity and wellbeing to accomplishment, and may judge others who didn't achieve as much under pressure; bridging the gap between them and others will prove to be difficult.

Group Considerations:

- Celebrate the achievements
- Humanize them with humour
- Acknowledge complexity
- Validate their feelings



The Challenger: PROGRESS

If you were to ask them what they think is the important thing to consider is that we need to keep moving forward. We can't dwell; we have a solution and too many people depend on us getting the world back on track.

They know that there is a lot to be done, but it won't start until we do, and there's no better time than the present.





The Challenger

How to Spot Them: The background movers and shakers, the internal organizers, and the outspoken. They are attending workshops, sharing their learnings and putting plans in place.

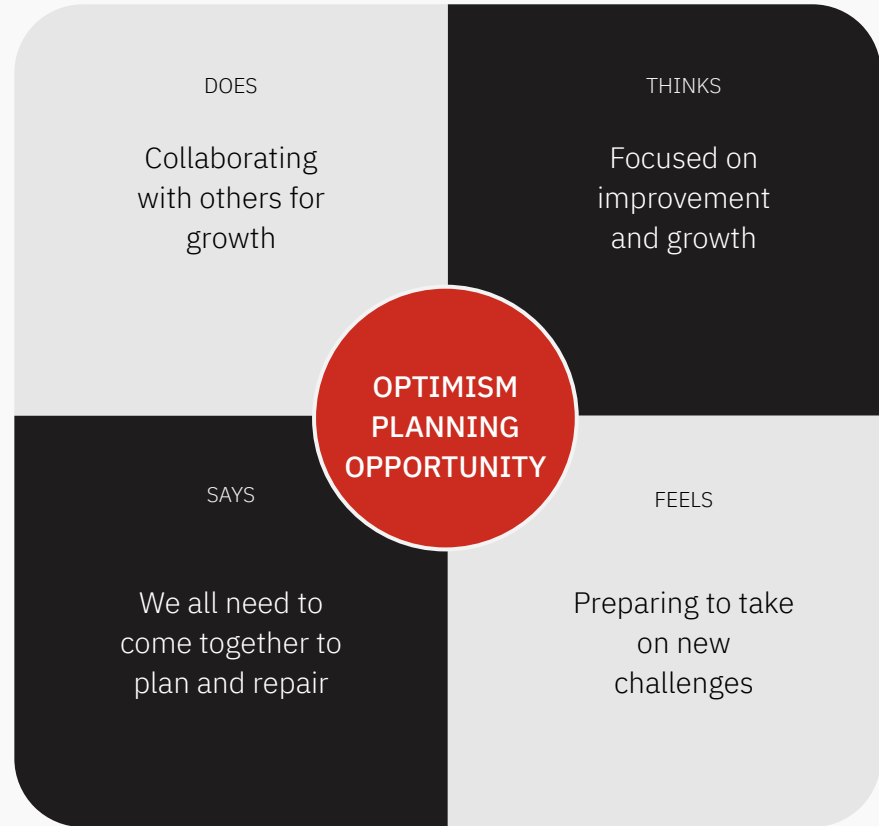
What They Want: An agreement that we're all working together to move forward. They feel that we can start from where left off with the new perspectives we can accelerating change.

What They Fear: That they are setting a standard for themselves that they can't uphold. They have their own feelings of sadness and grief, but they don't always want to express or acknowledge them for fear of invalidating or overshadowing the experiences of others.

Challenge: While they definitely understand the value of compromise and incremental change, demonstrating future-thinking is the only way to get their buy-in.

Group Considerations:

- Show progress from a starting point
- Provide opportunities to learn
- Create sincere feedback loops
- Demonstrate the group, not the individual



The Transformer: CHANGE

So much of the past year has shown us what works and what doesn't in our world, and they're ready to take those lessons and implement them across their communities.

We have new perspectives, new challenges and a more equitable POV - the After Times are as much a chance to create a new world as a time to return to the old one.





The Transformer

How to Spot Them: The posters and protesters, the future-focused and driven. They want to get moving on and changing things as we go. They don't want the 'right moment'; they feel that moment is now.

What They Want: To see the commitments made over the past years put into action and use the After Times as a chance to keep pushing forward.

What They Fear: That their actions were ineffective and therefore they were too. That despite their best efforts, we will resort to old patterns and that all the progress made was incremental.

Challenge: Without tangible demonstrations of authentic change and solutions, they will write off brands and experiences as insincere and opportunistic.

Group Considerations:

- Own a cause
- Provide opportunities to lead
- Demonstrate impact
- Create sincere feedback loops





Step By Step

Nothing is certain, and being adaptable is essential.

The Pandemic was disruptive, but for those fortunate enough to continue working - and from home - over 2020, there was an unexpected silver lining. Teleworking Canadians reported high productivity, with [90% of respondents to a Stats Canada study reporting that they were equally or more productive than they had been working from an office](#), and that over 40% would prefer to work from home for at least half of their work week going forward.

While there are a number of factors that indicate that this majority group - [an average of 51% of North Americans](#) - feel that adaptability and careful progress is essential, the [high rate of desire for retraining, particularly among Arts, Customer Service and Administration workers](#), show us that most of us believe that that 'Normal' is still far out of reach.

Whether it be about **ongoing concern for safety, the discovery of benefits** to adapting to new schedules, **a distrust of authority or other people**, or **simply uncertainty about the unknown**, this group isn't ready to believe it's over - but they do believe we need **to start negotiating a more flexible future.**

The Apprehender: AMBIVALENCE

When we said we were all in it together, they were handling a lot of things on their own. It's not that they didn't understand why, or how important it was, but their own loss and difficulties have set them back considerably.

It's not that they don't want to get back to their lives; they just want to make sure we are entirely sure it's time, because they're not prepared to start rebuilding only to have it all taken away again.





The Apprehender

How to Spot Them: The networkers and the hustlers, the readers and sharers of the news. They are looking for openings and opportunities, but carefully. They are in a stop-start mode.

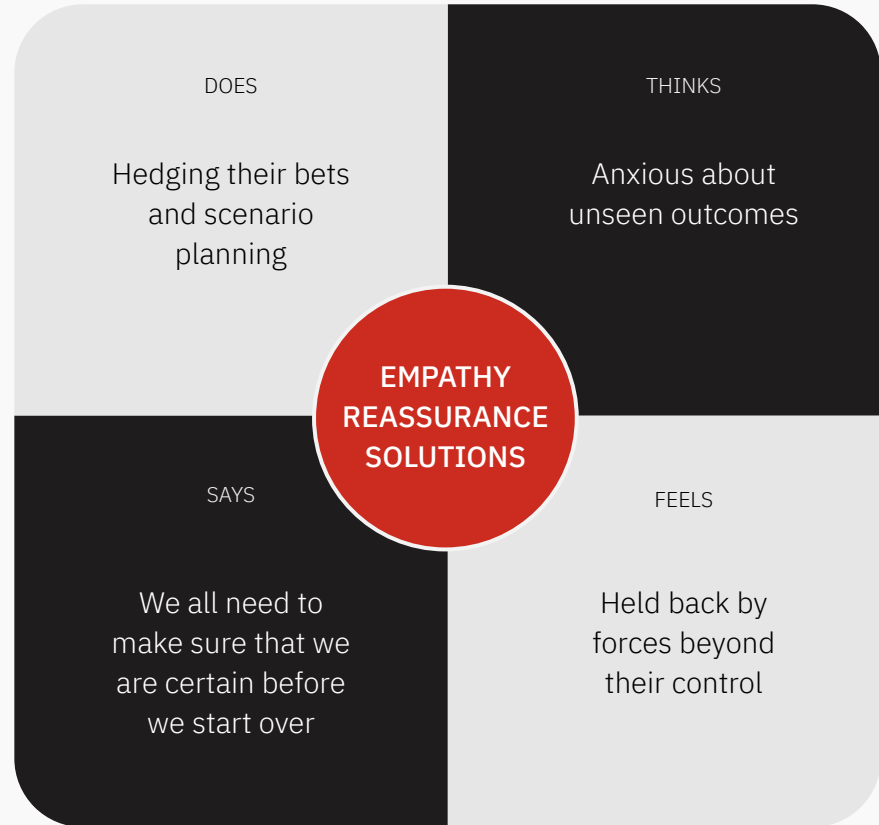
What They Want: Reassurance and comfort. They are looking for the signs of security and stability, and they want to know those are here to stay - even if it's just small, incremental indications.

What They Fear: The values they have always relied on failed to support them, and they are left with a sense of mistrust in both the world - but also themselves. They are worry that they can no longer make the right decision.

Challenge: Large, grand statements of recovery and a 'return to normal' fill them with anxiety; they are trying to consider every aspect before they will allow themselves to feel invested, and they need to know brands are too.

Group Considerations:

- Create a distinct role for them
- Remove ambiguity from communications
- Make firm commitments
- Validate their feelings



The Negotiator: COMPROMISE

If you had told them a year ago how much they wouldn't miss water cooler chatter, or that they would have a daily yoga practice, they would have looked at you sideways. What a difference a year makes.

Now they're ready to regain some normalcy, but it sounds a lot to them like their coworkers expect a full return to the old ways - and they're not really excited by the idea.





The Negotiator

How to Spot Them: The proud parents, the ‘stressed yet blessed’, and the new routine lovers. The ones with real backgrounds, and the less-enthusied about back-to-the-office planning.

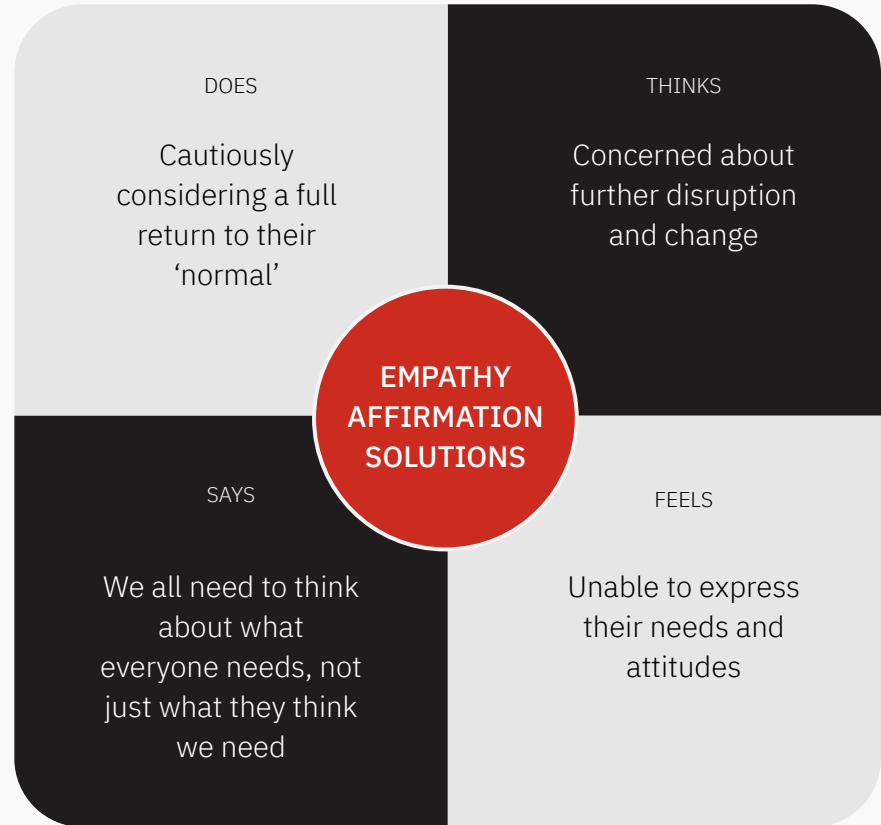
What They Want: To have their organization and co-workers understand that while it isn’t easy, they have gained more than they lost. That they get that people miss the rhythm and the chatter, but that they are more productive and can make the balance work even when others can’t.

What They Fear: They worry about going against the group and being viewed as not a ‘team player’. They don’t want their point of view to be dismissed as self-serving, or dissension.

Challenge: They worry that people aren’t seeing the individual in the collective. They can’t relate to messaging solely about emerging from hardship.

Group Considerations:

- Proceed step-by-step
- Introduce them to others like them
- Provide options and flexibility
- Demonstrate the individual, not the group



The Advisor: WARINESS

While some people were mourning the loss of 'normal' they were quick to remind them that normal wasn't exactly great for everyone. They weren't surprised by the political shifts at play, and they welcomed some of the more difficult conversations at work.

Now that we're getting ready to come back, they worry that means a full return - including a return to the status quo, and that's something they're not ready for.





The Advisor

How to Spot Them: The hand-raisers, the 'what-abouts' and the reminders. The ones who bring up the exceptions to the rule. The ones voicing concern on behalf of others, and the ones looking beyond their immediate sphere to the outside.

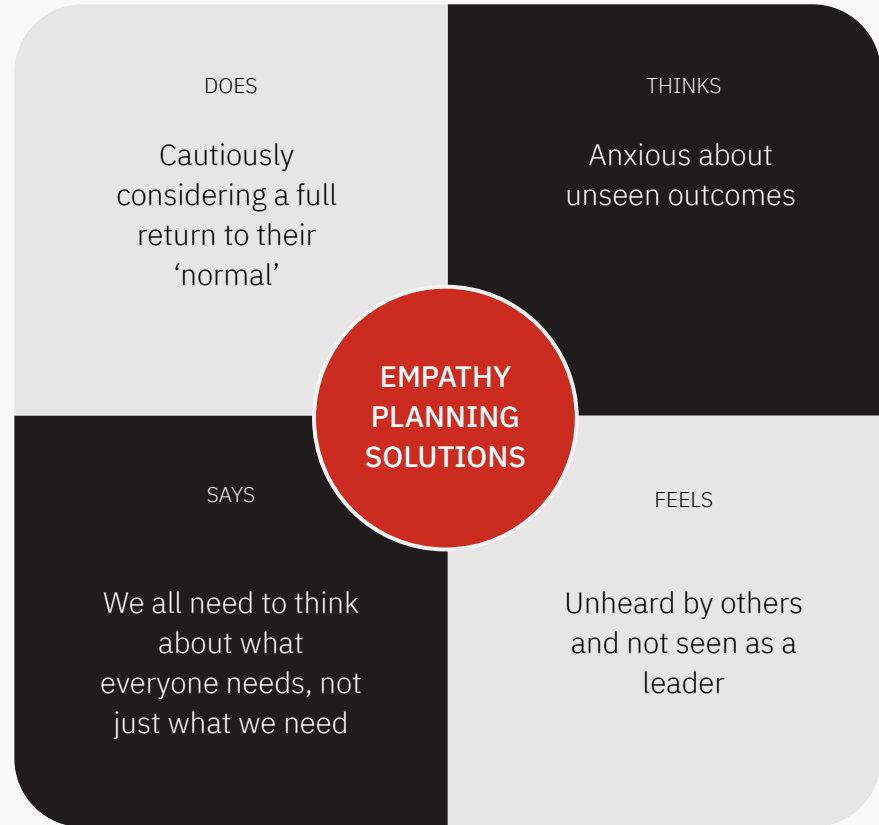
What They Want: Acknowledgement of their perspective and the experience of others. They want to ensure that it was more than 'big talk'. They want their anxieties addressed, not ignored in favour of optimism.

What They Fear: They worry about being drowned out among louder voices. They don't want to push to the front, but they are concerned that they are being excluded and ignored.

Challenge: They may not realize that a lot of their feelings is a by-product of their own personal concerns, and that speaking to the 'you' directly makes them feel uncomfortable and called out.

Group Considerations:

- Own a cause
- Create a distinct role for them
- Be proactive, not reactive
- Provide opportunities to teach



The Protector: PREPAREDNESS

They feel that the best way you can judge a society is how the least among us are treated, and this past year had some less than pretty truths about our society. They've been fortunate, but also constantly concerned for the suffering of others.

Their biggest concern is that we need a plan in place to ensure everyone is given what they need - medically, financially and more - so that we all start at our best.





The Protector

How to Spot Them: The vocal advocates and the big-picture protestors. They are showing up physically and digitally, and holding leadership accountable. They are creating discomfort, and they will hold that role as long as they think they need to.

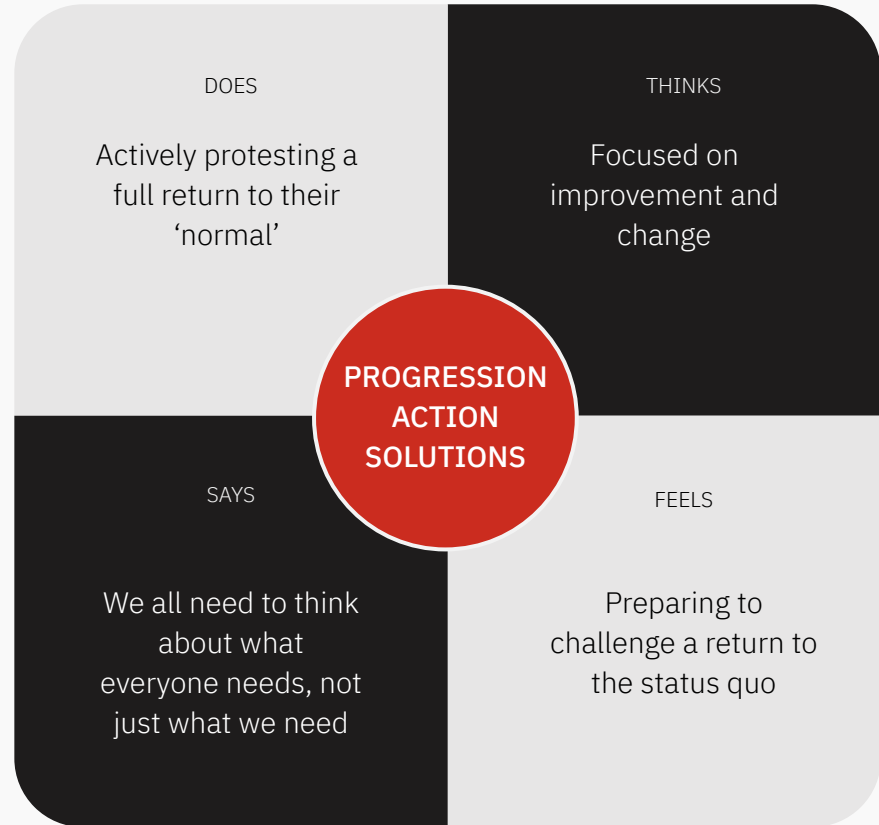
What They Want: To look at the big picture and know that we are thinking beyond the next six months. To make sure that nothing like this will ever happen again and that we are creating a better safety net.

What They Fear: That it won't just be others that will return to the status quo - they will too. They worry that as the world moves on we will all be swept up in excitement and lose our collective purpose.

Challenge: Our world is complicated, and so are the reasons for our current situation. Over-simplifying and 'middle-grounding' our messaging neglects to acknowledge the complexities and speaks to easy solutions - which don't exist.

Group Considerations:

- Own a cause
- Big picture, small details
- Provide opportunities to lead
- Demonstrate the individual in the group





Full Stop

The Pandemic isn't over yet, and we shouldn't act like it is.

Every time is an uncertain one, but for many of us that uncertainty has become a way of life - and with the rise of the Delta variant, that concern has become even more palpable.

With cases again on the rise despite increasing rates of vaccinations, [more and more people are feeling that their ongoing worries about relaxing restrictions are warranted](#), and there is no reassurance in sight.

Over [30% of North Americans are concerned that we are moving too fast](#) towards The After Times, and they are not only unprepared to return to 'Normal', but believe that none of us truly are. While the United States in particular has experienced tremendous loss of life, they aren't necessarily mourning a direct death or worried about a specific threat, but [the past year has shaken their trust in our leaders, our institutions](#), and each other.

Even if their friends and family feel they're overly cautious or unwilling to move on, this group is prepared to continue maintaining the life they have created during the Pandemic.

Marked by **grief, anxiety and mistrust** - or even just an **unwillingness to engage** - this group doesn't feel ready to change their habits, and won't for a long time.

The Griever: SADNESS

It's difficult to truly measure loss, but they have lost so much. A sense of identity, perhaps, or their job - or maybe they have lost someone close to them, or their belief in people.

Any way you look at it, these individuals are in a deep sense of mourning, and they haven't have the time to truly process it. As they see the world get excited to re-emerge, they simply can't share that feeling. They are worried we might forget, and forget about people like them.





The Griever

How to Spot Them: The quiet and melancholy. The unenthused. The ones who fail to see the point, to see ahead, and feel optimism. They were moving along but now they feel and seem stalled, unable to start up.

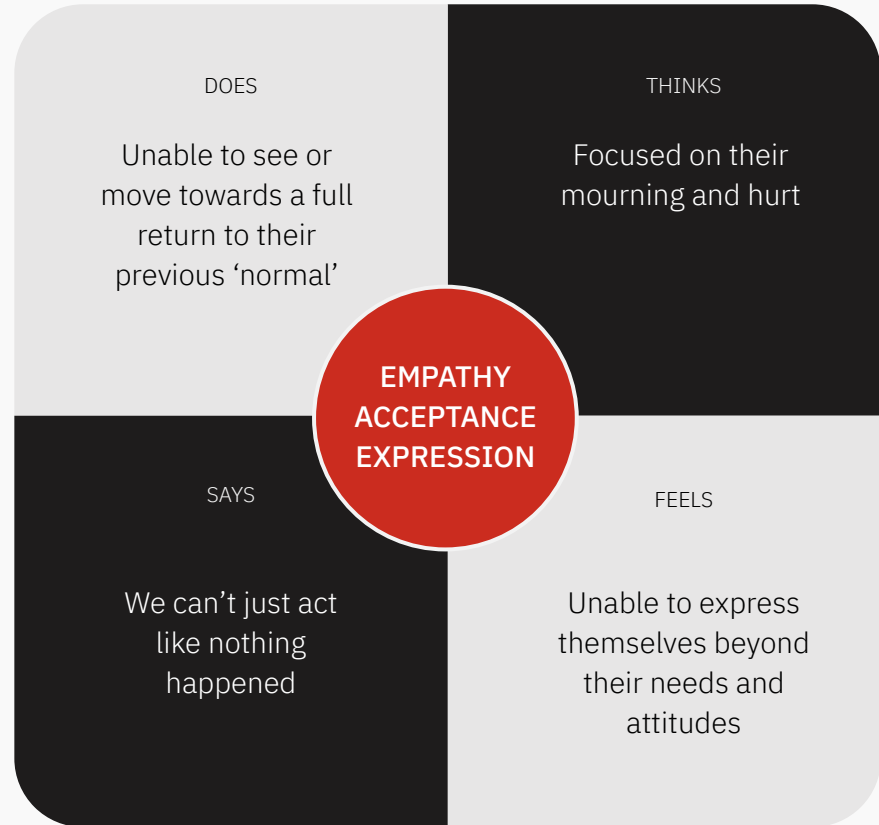
What They Want: That there is room for their feelings, and that others share it too - even if they don't feel like they can express it. That their anxiety won't be ignored and that we will continue to be in it together.

What They Fear: That they will be left behind, and no one will be there for them. They know that they are stuck in a pattern, but they can't get out - and everyone will move on without them.

Challenge: Focusing on recovery or joy alone feels to them like society wants to pretend that the last year - and everything that happened - didn't matter, and that those brands are not invested in people like them.

Group Considerations:

- Give without strings or expectations
- Introduce them to others like them
- Provide options for support
- Validate their feelings



The Doubter: MISTRUST

The past year has shaken their trust in our leaders, our systems and each other. They saw all the mixed messages about how to act, how we said everyone matters, and they were left with a sense of disillusionment and disappointment.

Every time someone says there is a plan, they can't believe it. When they say that it's cool, they're vaccinated, they don't feel confident. They don't want to move forward when they can't trust - but will they ever be able to?





The Doubter

How to Spot Them: The notably nervous. The consistent 'maybe' reply. The frequent researchers who seem unable to feel certainty. They once had a sense of optimism but now they appear shaken.

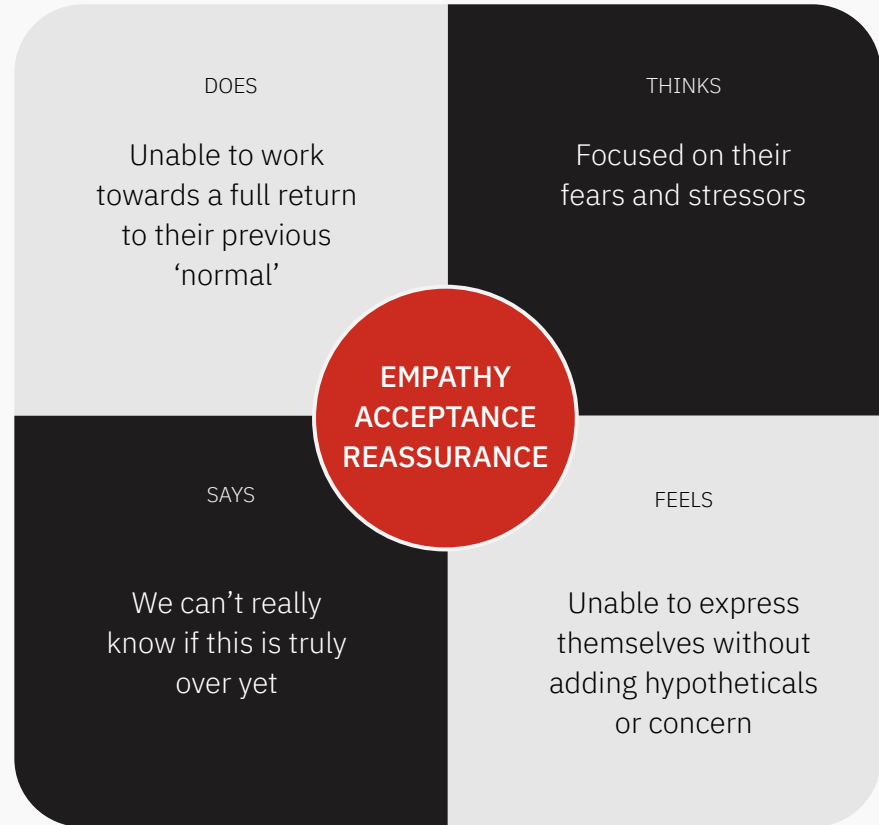
What They Want: To see objective, thoughtful evidence to reassure them that they are safe. That they aren't being dismissed - that their concerns are valid, heard and seen, and that we aren't just ignoring issues for the sake of normalcy.

What They Fear: That nothing is certain any more. Their faith in the future has been damaged and they won't be able to find something to hold on to, because their previous beliefs and values have all been challenged.

Challenge: Conventional sources of education and wisdom haven't provided them with the comfort they are looking for, and they need to feel safe - not just be told that they are.

Group Considerations:

- Proceed step-by-step
- Big picture, small details
- Commit only to what is certain
- Validate their feelings



The Hermit: SOLITUDE

The world was already a lot for them, so while they didn't welcome the circumstances, they welcomed an opportunity to retreat and decline. As they see the progress, it's not that they don't understand how other people feel - only that they aren't interested.

How do we create a world in the After Times that allows for everyone to play a role without forcing them to conform to our standards? Can we - or should we?





The Hermit

How to Spot Them: The event-decliners, the online community members and the stalled social profiles. They are conspicuous in their quiet.

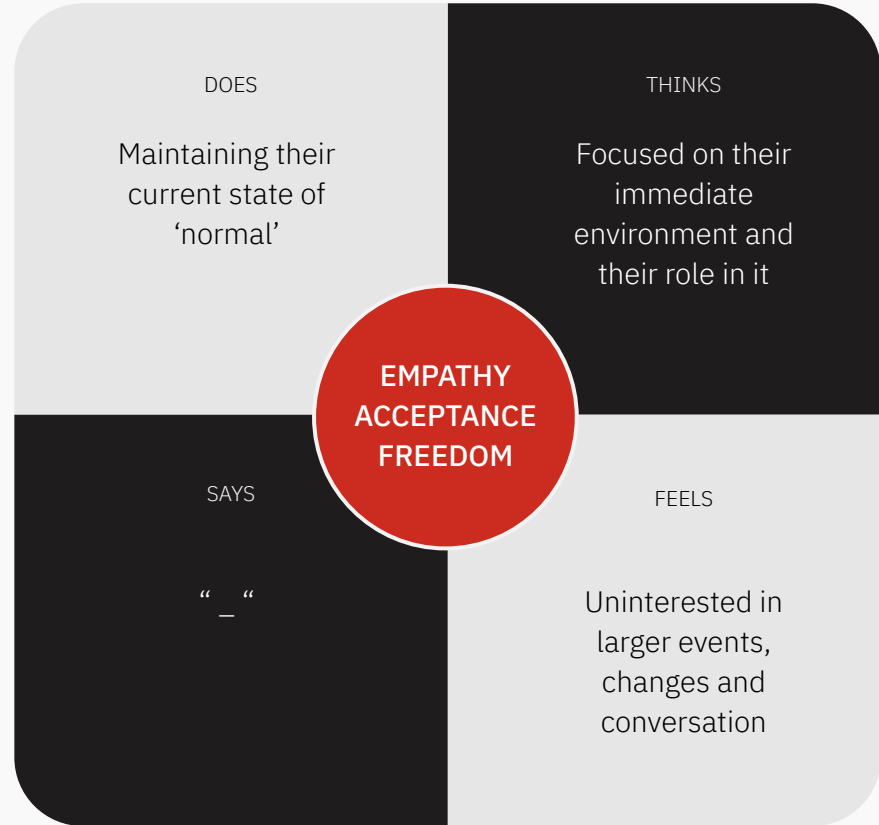
What They Want: To escape the noise; the news, the endless conversation, the debates and the celebrations. They may have found that the changes to their life during quarantine suited them, or that they began to lose interest in the things they enjoyed before.

What They Fear: That they will be forced to move ahead before they are ready or comfortable. They worry that there may be something 'wrong' with them, but they worry more that they will lose control of their comfort.

Challenge: How can reach someone who doesn't want to be reached? We can't assume their state - they may be conscious in their choices, satisfied and happy, or they may be feeling far more complicated. Without their permission, any potential outreach can be interpreted in the wrong way.

Group Considerations:

- Give without strings or expectations
- Come to them
- Measure beyond engagement
- Demonstrate the individual, not the group



The Guard: PREVENTION

It's not so much that they don't want to resume some sense of 'normal', to see their friends and make plans. It's more that they're worried about the potential for everything to fall apart with a single fresh outbreak.

Are we learning from our mistakes? Are we ignoring new developments in favour of recovery? They are want to move on, but not if the road is made of quicksand.





The Guard

How to Spot Them: The still-distancing, still-masking and still-nervous. They are active in community groups, calling for caution and care. They are living as if it were a few months ago, even if others around them seem to be moving on.

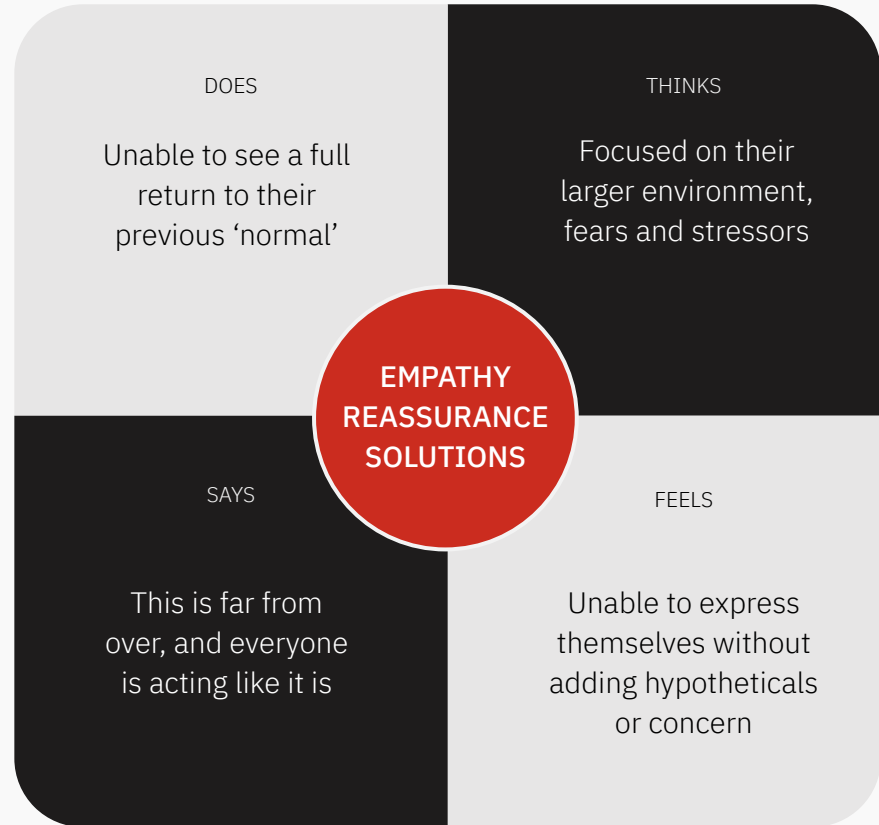
What They Want: To feel as their priorities are still shared by others. They feel as if we are being reckless, and moving forward without being mindful and careful.

What They Fear: That they are being actively excluded and ignored, no matter what they say or do. They worry that their valid fears have lost their impact on the choices of others, which will eventually affect them directly.

Challenge: In a world of 'What ifs', this group is firmly rooted in the hypothetical. They see new variants, new outbreaks, and while they see the numbers go down, they don't see them disappear; anything other than a complete elimination still makes them as anxious as before.

Group Considerations:

- Give without strings or expectations
- Big picture, big efforts
- Commit only to what is certain
- Demonstrate the group, not the individual



The Lens in Action

EXAMPLE APPLICATIONS





1

The Brand: A fashion retailer that caters to a mature, active woman who prioritizes comfort, unique styling and a flattering fit without being ‘matronly’

The Target: Women 60+, primarily retired and living outside of the urban core. She enjoys golfing, attending cultural events and spending time with her friends and family

The Client Ask: Their brick-and-mortar stores are open and ready for limited in-store shopping, which they would like to communicate to their core target audience through a targeted digital campaign, both on social media and through email



The Lens In Action:

PRIMARY TARGET FOR A CANADIAN FASHION RETAILER

Meet Marianne: She is in her mid- 70s and lives in Qualicum Beach, BC. Since she is now an empty nester living in a rural area, she has a close-knit circle of friends and is actively involved in the lives of her grandchildren. As a retiree, she spends her days reading, going for walks and watching the 5PM news daily.

While Marianne is very independent, she does have friends who are currently in communal and assisted living, and she worries about them - as well as her grandchildren going back to school. Among the first to receive the Covid vaccine, she doesn't understand why people seem so reluctant to 'do their part', especially when so many people are still getting sick - and she is getting tired of being cautious and wearing masks. It's hard for her not to feel anxious; there are new reports coming out all the time.

She has started online shopping for the first time, and while she still likes trying things on and chatting with the sales team in store, she likes the convenience, as well as the feeling of safety it provides her.

Probable Archetypes: The Apprehender, The Advisor, The Guard





The Target Through the Lens

EMPATHY: It can be hard to worry on behalf of people who don't seem all that worried themselves, especially when you're denying yourself the things you enjoy because they feel silly or unsafe.

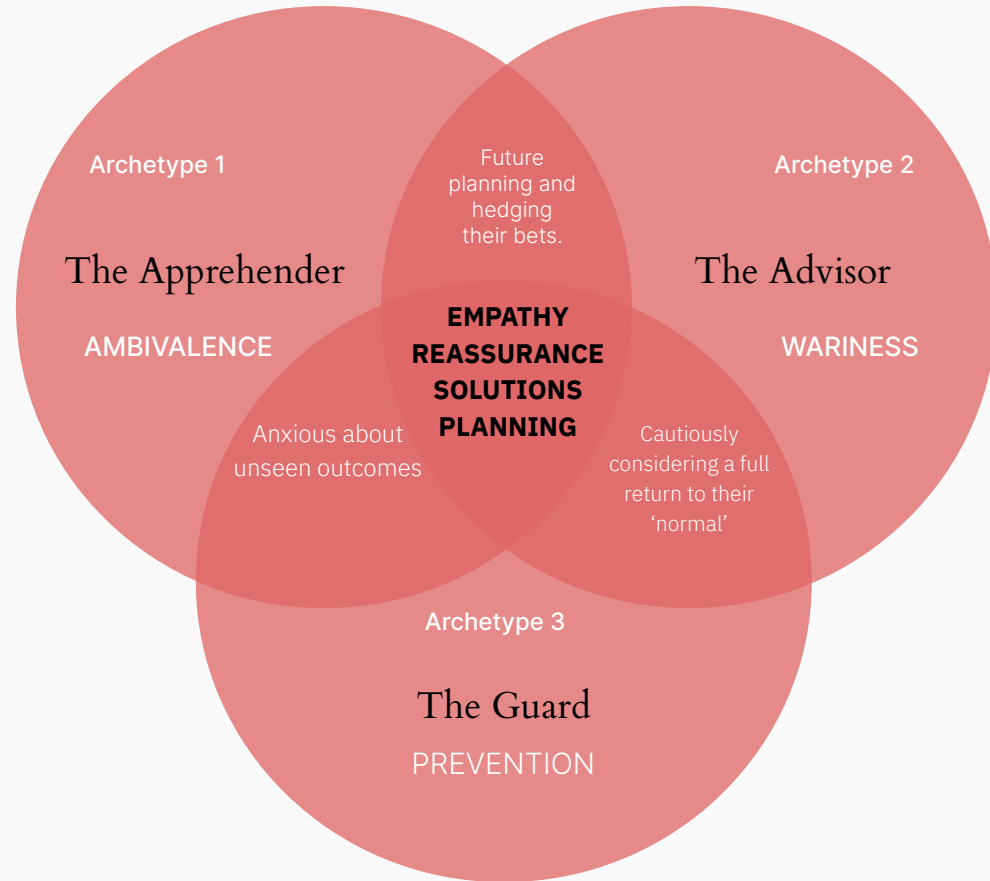
REASSURANCE: She wants to know that her priorities are our priorities - safety for her and the store staff - and that it's not wasteful or frivolous for her to want to enjoy shopping for new clothes.

SOLUTIONS: Considerations about how to get that 'in-store' shopping experience in a digital world should be applied, or private events so she can enjoy herself and not feel vulnerable.

PLANNING: Sharing how our brand intends on continuing to evolve and adapt as new challenges arise won't alarm her - it will make her feel good about her choices to shop with us.

What to avoid:

- Big proclamations and overly aspirational scenarios; she is no expert, but she is watching and reading the news
- Polarizing messaging that puts 'us' against 'them'; she is worried about everyone, no matter their beliefs
- Toxic positivity; she doesn't think that we can overcome this by not dwelling, but by working together





2

The Brand: A beverage company that specializes in CBD-, nootropic- and adaptogen-infused sparkling flavoured waters with a hip, youthful tone of voice

The Target: Men and women between 25-40, primarily urban and employed in Creative/Finance/Technology sectors

The Client Ask: Originally an innovative disruption in the space, they are facing a high rate of competition in a growing market and want to create a differentiated point of view to deepen affinity with their target market



The Lens In Action:

PRIMARY TARGET FOR A NORTH AMERICAN WELLNESS-FOCUSED CPG BRAND

Meet Doug: in his mid-30s and a Senior Associate at a high-profile VC firm, he lives in New York City with his partner. Prior to the Pandemic, he was on a fast-track to a principal title, with a wide social and professional network. While his career is still on fire he's been burned out by his inability to 'turn off' at the end of the day.

He's always de-stressed by going for runs with his dog, spending time in nature whenever he can and socializing, but he's also been practicing mindfulness, meditation, and yoga with his partner. He didn't expect it, but he's found that it's introduced him to a whole new set of ideas that he never considered before - like trying out CBD as a way of helping him unwind, instead of just another glass of wine.

His partner keeps bringing up the idea of moving out of the city and continuing to work remotely, but he's not sure how he feels about that idea. The Pandemic won't last forever, and while he likes some aspects of working from home, he wants to go back to the office as soon as he's allowed to - even though he feels like he can't admit it out loud.

Probable Archetypes: The Resetter, The Comeback, The Apprehender





The Target Through the Lens

REASSURANCE: He isn't nervous, but he does feel guilty that he wants to move on and get back to normal, especially as he has been safe and employed throughout the Pandemic.

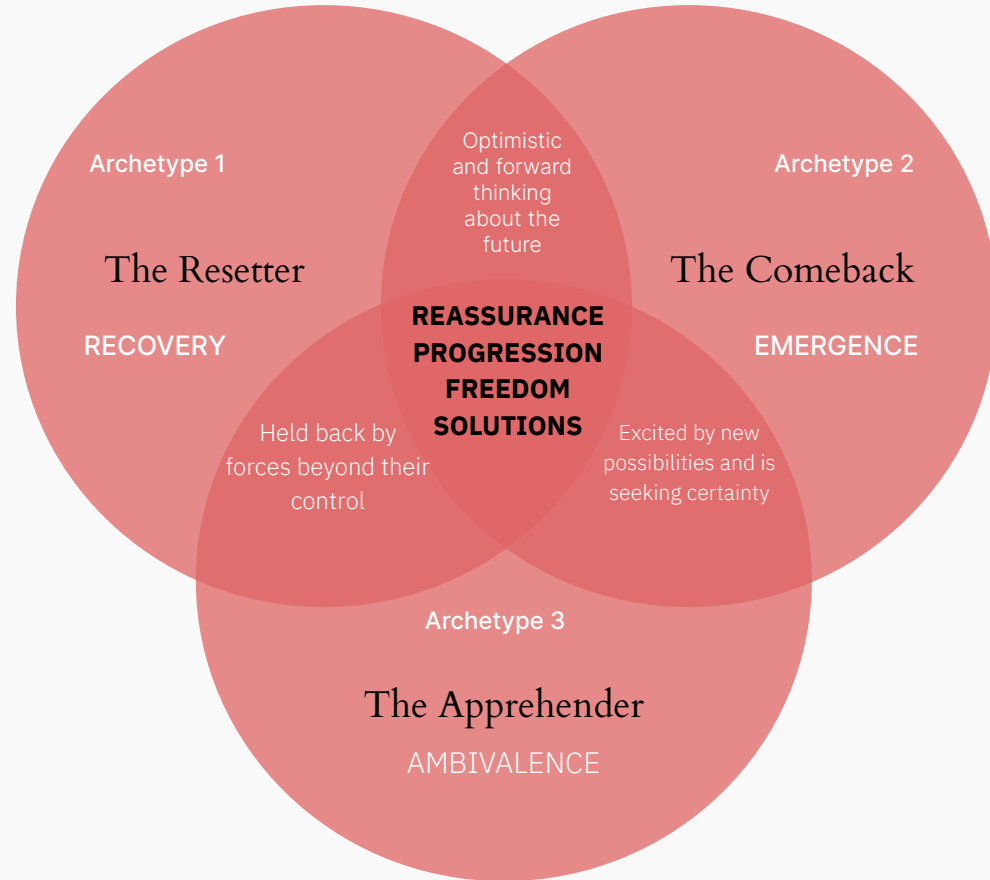
PROGRESSION: Outlining steps towards recovery and efforts about protecting consumers speaks to him; it gives him hope, but also provides him with a rationale for his own choices.

FREEDOM: Providing him with a safe space to express his frustration and desire to move forward will be welcome, as well as opportunities for him to escape the monotony while he waits to move on.

SOLUTIONS: Now that he is more open than before to new ways to manage his stress and maintain more balance, our brand can play a role in creating opportunities for him to escape and clear his mind - with our product at the centre.

What to avoid:

- Over-promising; he's a realist
- Polarizing messaging that puts 'us' against 'them; he doesn't consider himself very political'
- Toxic positivity; he may be meditating but that is to help him manage stress, not 'raise his vibes'



The Methodology

OUR APPROACH TO SEEING
UNCERTAIN NEW PERSPECTIVES



STRESS RESPONSES



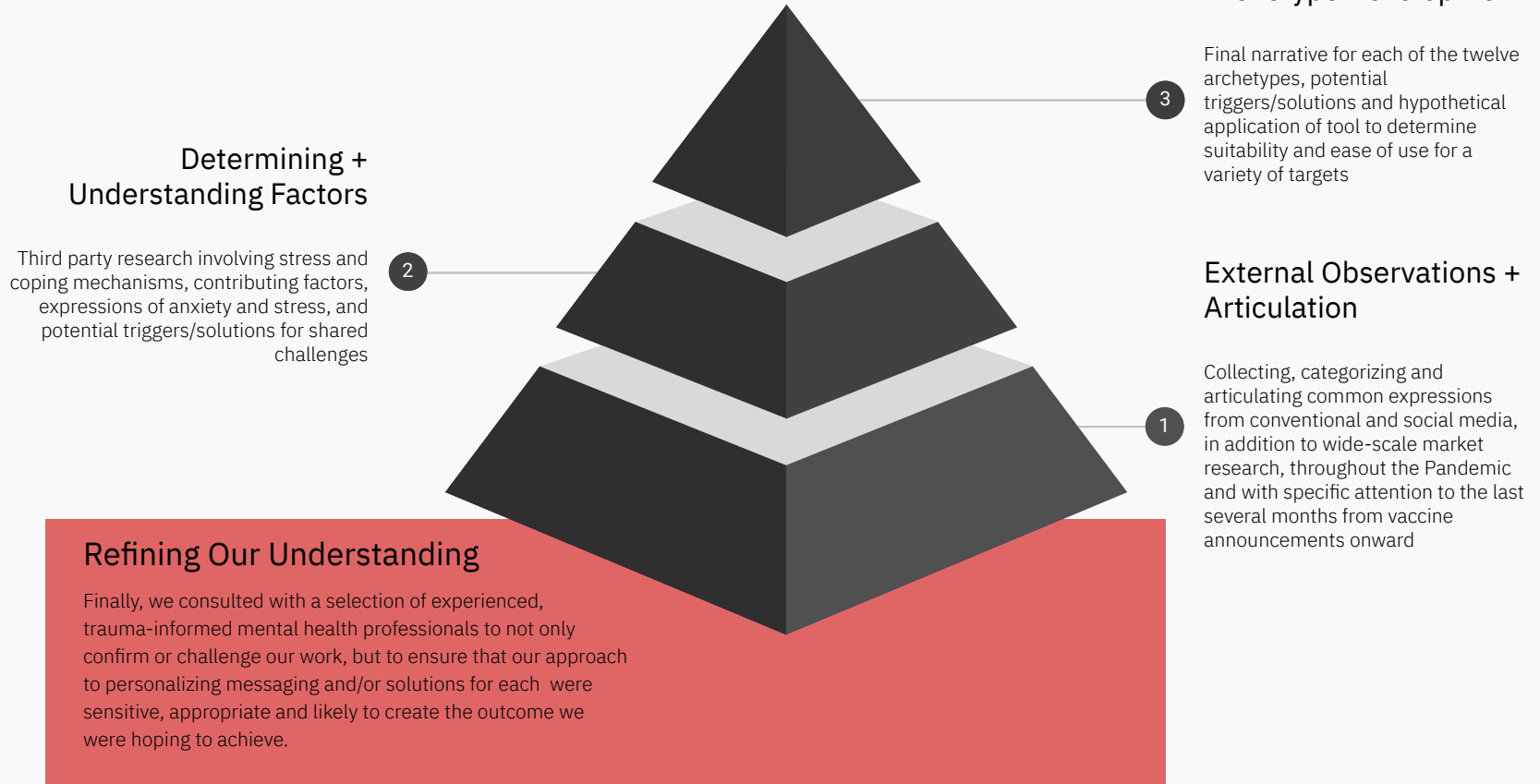
HESITANCY



COPING



Our Approach: Development





Our Approach: Rationale

WHAT WE FELT

STRESS RESPONSES

Categorizing first on a 'positive' or 'negative' response to stress (proactive/energizing vs. fight/flight/freeze) and then further categorizing by focus of stress, whether personal or social based on larger societal indicators.



HOW WE FEEL

LEVELS OF HESITATION

Second, looking to current market research to understand consumer sentiment about speed to return to 'normal', comfort levels and concerns about safety to gauge overall anxiety and desire to interact in previous manners.



WHAT WE NEED

COPING MECHANISMS

We then viewed responses and sentiment through a need to cope; defense or coping styles are indicative of fulfilling personal needs and may be used as an indicator for what consumers groups are seeking and where brands can add value.

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION

Reviews and feedback from trauma-informed mental health professionals were sought and applied in lieu of direct consumer access and detailed psychographic research for accuracy, sensitivity and outcome likelihood.



Assumptions

WE HAVE ALL EXPERIENCED STRESS

After more than a year in a global Pandemic, we have all experienced long-term stress - from worry about exposure and job insecurity, to social stressors and loss of routine - regardless of our income, region or beliefs.

WE HAVE ALL CHANGED

There are extensive studies that show that exposure to long-term stress has significant effects on our bodies and minds, from chronic physical conditions to related mental health issues.

WE HAVE NEW NEEDS

Every aspect of our lives have been touched by the Pandemic - not the least of which includes our relationships with our homes, organizations, occupations, and each other.

WE DON'T KNOW WHAT'S NEXT

We cannot begin to measure the long-term impact of these stressors on ourselves, nor can we predict the future; these assumptions are meant only to assess the immediate.

CAVEATS AND EXCEPTIONS

Individual Trauma and Resiliency Can't Be Measured

Despite surface indications, such as personal wealth, ability to work from home, or intense challenges, the depth of trauma or how individuals were equipped to handle it must be generalized to remain applicable to targeting.

Long-Term Impact Is an Unknown Factor

There has not been a global event of this magnitude since WW2, and without a better understanding of C/PTSD, long-term studies do not exist. There is no real data to indicate how we interpret wide-scale impact or trauma, so our archetypes are focused on the next 6-12 months.

Archetypes Are a Lens; Targets Remain

These archetypes are not intended to substitute our client targets, but to apply a perspective to how these existing targets may interpret our communications and the solutions they may require.

CAVEATS AND EXCEPTIONS

Statistics Do Not Reveal Community Impact

While the data being reported - particularly in the United States - are staggering, some groups were impacted more than others. Working class people unable to work from home, certain cultural demographics; their relationship to Pandemic varies. Please consider the environment of your targets when selecting your appropriate lenses.

Global Influence Has Been Set Aside.

These archetypes are focused on North America due to the nature of the our market expertise; while COVID-19 has impacted the world and NA has a heavy rate of immigration and diversity, our attention has been narrowed for greater accuracy. These do not account for the difference in perspectives for cultures and communities beyond Canada and the United States of America.

We welcome you to use the format created and the methodology outlined in this document to apply your own understanding to customize this for your markets.



Responses

STRESS RESPONSES

We first created two core groups based on two primary categorizations of stress - [Eustress, or positive stress, and Distress, a negative one](#). While our brains register them differently, our physiological responses are much the same, [meaning even 'positive' responses to stress will leave a long-term physical impact](#). Consumer research released in May 2021 by Leger revealed that [North Americans were relatively anxious about returning to normal - 51% expressed some or high anxiety](#). While the existence of 'positive stress' is a contested one, we believe that when looking at coping mechanisms we can see both productive and non-productive, or negative expressions over the pandemic.

STRESS FOCUS

This same study showed that societal impacts (overall health, political unrest, etc.) were of a similar level of concern to personal impacts, resulting in a secondary segmentation. While these levels have been reported as decreasing, we can assume that we still have similar priorities; large-scale concerns versus immediate or personal concerns.

FOCUSED ON THE IMMEDIATE
'MAKING DO', 'HOLDING ON'

SURVIVING

ABLE TO CONSIDER THE FUTURE
'FINDING TIME', 'DISCOVERING'

THRIVING

FOCUSED ON SELF AND IMMEDIATE CIRCLE
OVERWHELMED BY SCALE

INDIVIDUAL

FOCUSED ON COMMUNITY AND GLOBAL SCALE
OVERWHELMED BY PERSONAL IMPACT

COLLECTIVE



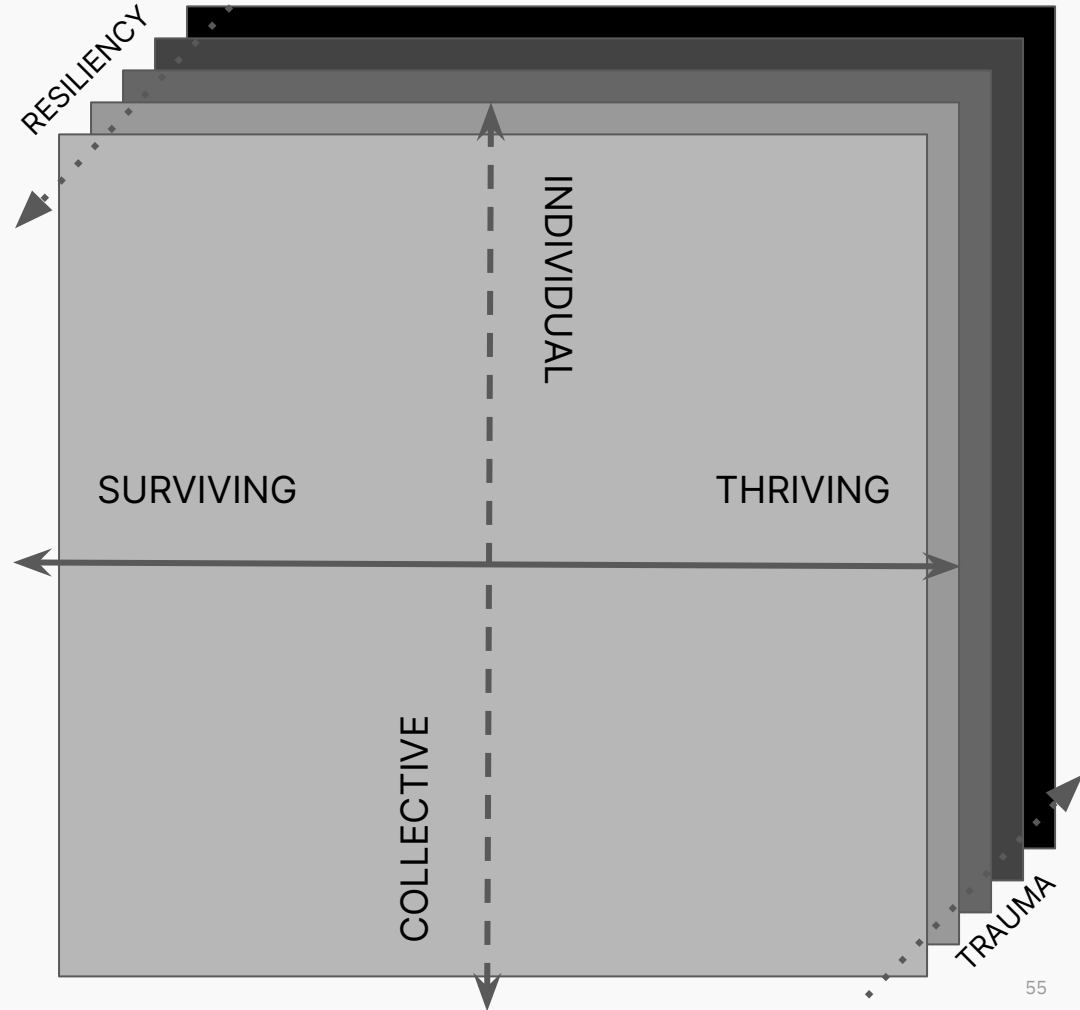
Response Quadrants

SURVIVING VS. THRIVING

Accepting that both Distress and Eustress (Surviving vs. Thriving) are all forms of stress with individual coping mechanisms and that we can shift between the two develops a simple binary that has an external expression. While these shifts are common, those in long-term survival mode are less likely to release those feelings and move out of this quadrant.

INDIVIDUAL VS. COLLECTIVE

With the understanding that our focus shifts depending on our personal comfort, incidents in the news or communities and more, a secondary binary was included. Expressions of individual and collective concern are both visible and variable.





SURVIVING INDIVIDUALISTS

The Pushers

COVID-19 turned their whole lives upside-down, and they have been trying to manage the figurative fire ever since.

Whether it's been a series of small losses that have added up into an unmanageable situation, a catastrophic loss or a combination of both, these people have been in fight for their - or their family's - survival, with very few pauses in between.

Extended job loss, evictions, bill collections and grief have touched them, and it may take a long time for them to truly recover - if they even have the time to explore their own feelings.

Ontario food banks saw a surge in use of their services, with [some reporting a 54% YOY](#) increase in August 2020.

[40,000 jobs](#) were lost in British Columbia alone in just **one year**.

In just [two months](#), the coronavirus pandemic has wiped out nearly **the whole decade** of job gains from the Great Recession.

The Government of Alberta [introduces a \\$185M retraining program](#) to overcome **9% unemployment rate**.

[1 in 5 youth](#) are experiencing **clinically elevated anxiety** symptoms since the pandemic started.

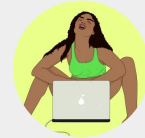
“Sometimes the only way out is through.”



[HOARDING RETURNS](#)



[REINSTATED MASK MANDATES](#)



[THE RISE OF ONLYFANS](#)



[RECESSION INEQUALITY](#)

[Mental health visits](#) for new moms **rose 30%** during the pandemic.



THRIVING INDIVIDUALISTS

The Adaptors

It's not that their lives didn't change, or weren't touched by COVID-19, only that they discovered how well the new world suited them - or that they were well equipped to handle this.

Perhaps they found that the space gave them time to learn new things about themselves, or that they could pivot into a new career or get better at the one they had. Perhaps they dabbled in Crypto, or they and their families had a way to accommodate and adapt together.

Maybe they just learned how resilient they really were. Any way you look at it, the world changed and so did they.

Pinterest searches for topics like **mindfulness, baking** and **home organization** reached [historic highs](#).

Global interest in **pet adoptions** surged in the [early phase of the pandemic](#).

North America's [digitization adoption](#) of products & services has accelerated **by 6 years** amidst COVID-19.

Only [6% of Ontario](#) desk workers want to go back to the office **full-time**.

Suburban cities in Canada saw an [average population growth of 2.1%](#) as people leave urban centres in record numbers.

Peloton became profitable for the first time, [seeing a 172% increase in sales and shares rising more than 220% in value](#) - with a 0.52% churn, or unsubscribe, rate.

“We don't have to fall apart because everything else is.”



[RUG TIKTOK](#)



[ACNH GRADUATIONS](#)



[RETURN OF RVs](#)



[STREAMING GROWTH](#)

Entrepreneurs launched **500,000 more new businesses** in the US compared to the [year previous](#).



SURVIVING COLLECTIVE

The Agonizers

It can be hard to feel like we are truly all in this together when you see others doing well, being casual about mask wear, or are surrounded by closed businesses and empty apartments.

Fatigue sets in; whether you are a healthcare worker watching the effects of COVID-19, a small business owner on a once-bustling Main Street, or someone who just can't stop watching the news, this group feels exhausted by the collective need.

Even if their own lives were held together during the Pandemic, they worry about our recovery and how it will affect everyone.

On disaster recovery...*“It isn’t until the stressor **starts to be removed** that we can really see what that toll has taken.”*

In the wake of George Floyd’s murder, each one of the top ten books on the NYT Nonfiction bestseller list were about racism and racial justice.

A June 2021 IMI survey showed that Canadians won’t feel comfortable attending most live events until at least December 2021.

More than half of all fully vaccinated people said they were **still wearing masks.**

“The world isn’t really made to support all of us.”

Fox News ended 2020 as **one of the top 10 networks – broadcast and cable** – in TV viewership rankings for the advertiser-preferred 18–49 demographic.



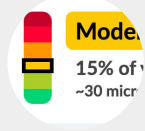
ANTI-VAXX FRIEND WARS



SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTIONS



SURVIVOR'S GUILT



microCOVID RISK CALCULATOR

15% of registered nurses in Ontario could **leave the profession** following the pandemic



THRIVING COLLECTIVE

The Helpers

It's amazing how some people really become galvanized and find their purpose amidst panic. They see suffering, and they rise to meet it. They see inequality, and they push back. They find solutions, and where they can't, they create them.

This group met their neighbours for the first time because of the Pandemic. They created new initiatives, new businesses, and kept the group chat going. Maybe they found others like them, and invented, organized and rallied.

Either way, it's been a challenge - but one they were ready for. Only question is there room for their talent for fixing in our new reality?

Telemedicine and other emerging technologies are already demonstrating their [immense potential](#).

The International Red Cross saw **a historic surge of volunteers** [across all of Europe](#).

[Congresswoman Cori Bush camps out](#) on the steps of the US Capitol **to protest the end of the Covid anti-eviction moratorium**.

Countries bound together to create the [COVID-19 vaccines](#) in an **unprecedented** period of time.

More than 300 psychologists in Ontario **offered their services for free** [to frontline workers without coverage](#).

“None of us are stronger or smarter than all of us.”



[PRODUCTION PIVOTS](#)



[CONQUER COVID-19](#)



[DOG COINS DONATION](#)



[SIPPO MASK](#)

UNICEF's [#GiveAVax](#) matching fund encourages **Canadians to donate** to global vaccination efforts.



Hesitancy

Our next step was to determine their current state of stress, which lead us to hesitancy as a means to measure this.

CONCERN ABOUT ‘RETURNING TO NORMAL’
[A recent IMI NextWave™ consumer survey shows that across North America](#) (adjusted for the median to reflect both countries) people are clearly divided into three core categories regarding our loosening of safety measures:

32% felt that we were moving **too fast**,
49% felt that we were at **the right pace**, and
19% felt that we weren’t moving **fast enough**.

These expressions of concern about our changes in safety procedures have been interpreted in this process not as anxiety, which is a personal and emotional state that is either generalized or specific. We chose to define it as hesitation - meaning that there were concerns or rationalizations regarding our overall safety or how we judge individual scenarios.

PREPARED TO GET ‘BACK TO NORMAL’
FOCUSED ON FORWARD MOMENTUM
LIVING IN THE NOW

LOW HESITANCE

CAUTIOUS ABOUT CHANGE AND RECOVERY
FOCUSED ON CERTAINTY
CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE

SOME HESITANCE

UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THE ‘AFTER TIMES’
FOCUSED ON POTENTIAL OUTCOMES
LIVING IN THE HYPOTHETICAL

HIGH HESITANCE



Articulations

After developing our groups based on expressions of, and focal points for stress, we then created an additional segmentation based on these expressions of hesitancy.

We then worked under the assumption that current feelings around resuming normal activities and loosening up safety measures does not have a correlation to Pandemic stress response - those from each category can fall into each of these groups.

Through the original categorization each sub-group was given a potential motivation or rationalization for their hesitancy. In lieu of specific data, these were designed to reflect the following and discussed with our mental health experts:

1. Distress vs. Eustress
2. Individual vs. Collective focus
3. Common coping mechanisms
4. Expression of hesitancy

Pushers

I want to get my life back on track and go back to where I was before all this started.

I don't want to get back to work, get earning and rebuilding, and have it taken away. We have to be sure.

I've lost so much. My job, my savings, even family members. We are moving too fast; it's not right.

Adaptors

I've done a lot but I've also put so much on hold. I'm excited to get out there and continue with some of that momentum.

I've been really fortunate and kind of enjoyed all of this. I don't know how much of my new life I have to give up.

I don't really want to go back - is that wrong? I don't want to commute any more, or make small talk. I'm happy.

Agonizers

I believe that we can't hesitate any more; we have to start things up again, because people are suffering.

I see the need to get back out into the world, but I also don't want to see us slide back to where we just were.

I don't think we can really trust the outcome; like, how do I know people are even vaccinated? I'm not ready.

Helpers

I think that recovery is going to be tough, but I know that if we work together with everyone in mind, we'll be ok.

I know I am ready, but is everyone? Have we all made the effort to ensure no one is left behind? I'm not sure.

I think that unless we have something better in place, or something to better protect us, we can't do this.

HESITANCY

20%
NOT FAST ENOUGH

49%
APPROPRIATE SPEED

32%
TOO FAST



Coping

Finally, we then sought to understand what these groups would need to navigate the coming months by looking at how they coped with the stressors of the past year - how they used their time and soothed themselves, without attempting to attribute positive or negative perspectives.

LONG-TERM COPING

As no data exists for the long-term impacts of stress or how we manage them on the scale required, we sought out equivalencies to understand how we cope. [While studies exist regarding long-term effects after the World Trade Centre attacks](#), we felt that the singular nature of the occasion and varying degrees of personal relevance made it difficult to create an equivalency.

[Instead we looked to studies of teenagers and their coping strategies both during and after the Cold War](#); a long-term exposure to a global stressor that was both unseen and difficult to predict the outcome of. [One of these studies in particular leveraged Bond's Defense Style Questionnaire](#), a tool used to self-assess coping styles, which allowed us to add this final layer.

CONSCIOUS EFFORTS TO MANAGE
STRESS AND ANXIETY; PROACTIVE

CONSCIOUS

BOTH AWARE AND UNAWARE OF ACTIONS
AS THEY RELATE TO STRESS AND ANXIETY

VARIABLE

UNCONSCIOUS RESPONSES TO
STRESS AND ANXIETY; REACTIVE

UNCONSCIOUS

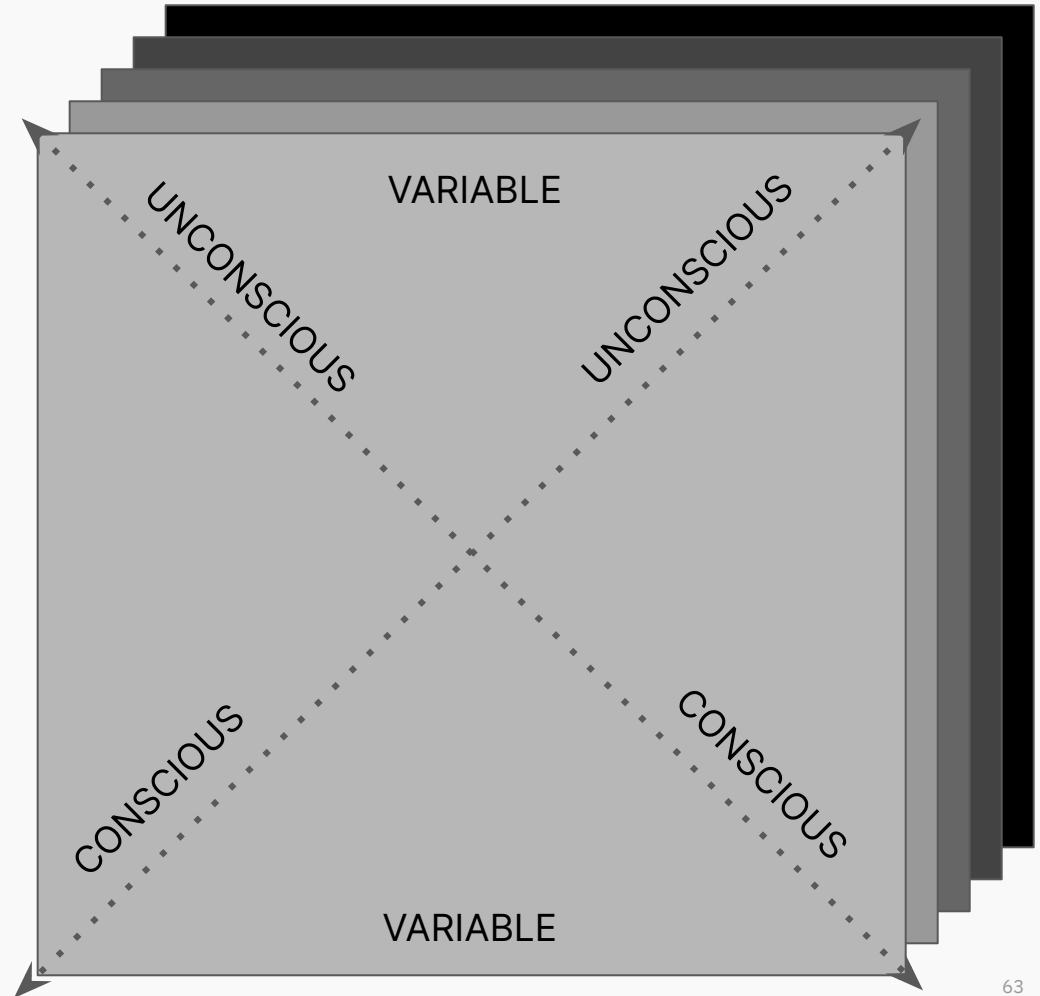


Coping

[While Bond's DSO is used as a self-assessment tool](#) and is rooted in - but expands on - Freud's initial classifications of coping/defense styles, we chose to detach those behaviours from their currently defined groups or binaries [like those applied in this study concerning university students in Hiroshima, Japan](#).

In other words, we wanted to remove language that we thought was judgemental or attributed a value to how individuals handled their stress during the Pandemic. We felt this is key, particularly as the majority of common behaviours can be both positive and negative, depending on the degree and the ways in which they are applied.

Instead we chose to focus on a variable spectrum of consciously managing your stress levels through coping mechanisms and unconsciously responding; both of these can be applied to how we handle all forms of stress.





Articulations

Leveraging these studies, we then selected some of the most common coping mechanisms, such as sublimation, withdrawal or suppression, and aligned them with our previous articulations of hesitancy.

This is not intended to be a diagnostic tool, nor is meant to equate a specific behaviour with ‘good’ or ‘bad’ approaches, but to understand target needs and how to fulfill them.

Regression, as an example, is about returning to a childlike state; this can be both expressed in lashing out or in a desire for nostalgic media and toys. One is negative, whereas the other one is benign; both are attempts to return to a place of emotional safety. Therefore we can argue that those regressing require security, which indicates that our communications should soothe and reassure to be successful.

Pushers

Adaptors

Agonizers

Helpers

COPING

“I know I will have to deal with my feelings at some point, but I can’t right now.”	“I’m fine; I feel like everyone is too focused on the wrong things and too anxious to make the right choices.”	“I don’t want to move on. I don’t want to forget. I don’t think I’ll ever be healed.”
“I can worry about everything going on, or I can put my energy towards something productive.”	“If I’m honest, I have actually enjoyed myself more than anything else and I could continue living like this.”	“I’m okay. I just don’t feel like meeting up, even outside. It’s not about COVID - I just want to be at home.”
“I hate everything happening right now and I can’t believe how inept the response from everyone in charge is.”	“I think that there’s a lot of people who need to be held responsible for how all this has played out. So when?”	“I feel like the world acted like things were good for everyone and I don’t really see the need to go back to the way things were.”
“I can’t focus on myself when there’s people who are really suffering and I can help them.”	“I feel that this last year is a real example of how our current systems are set up to fail the majority of us.”	“I think that if we can use this as an opportunity to change things then it will all be worthwhile.”

LOW HESITANCY

SOME HESITANCY

HIGH HESITANCY



The Uncertainty Lens

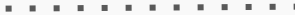
VISIBLE and FIRM SPECTRUM



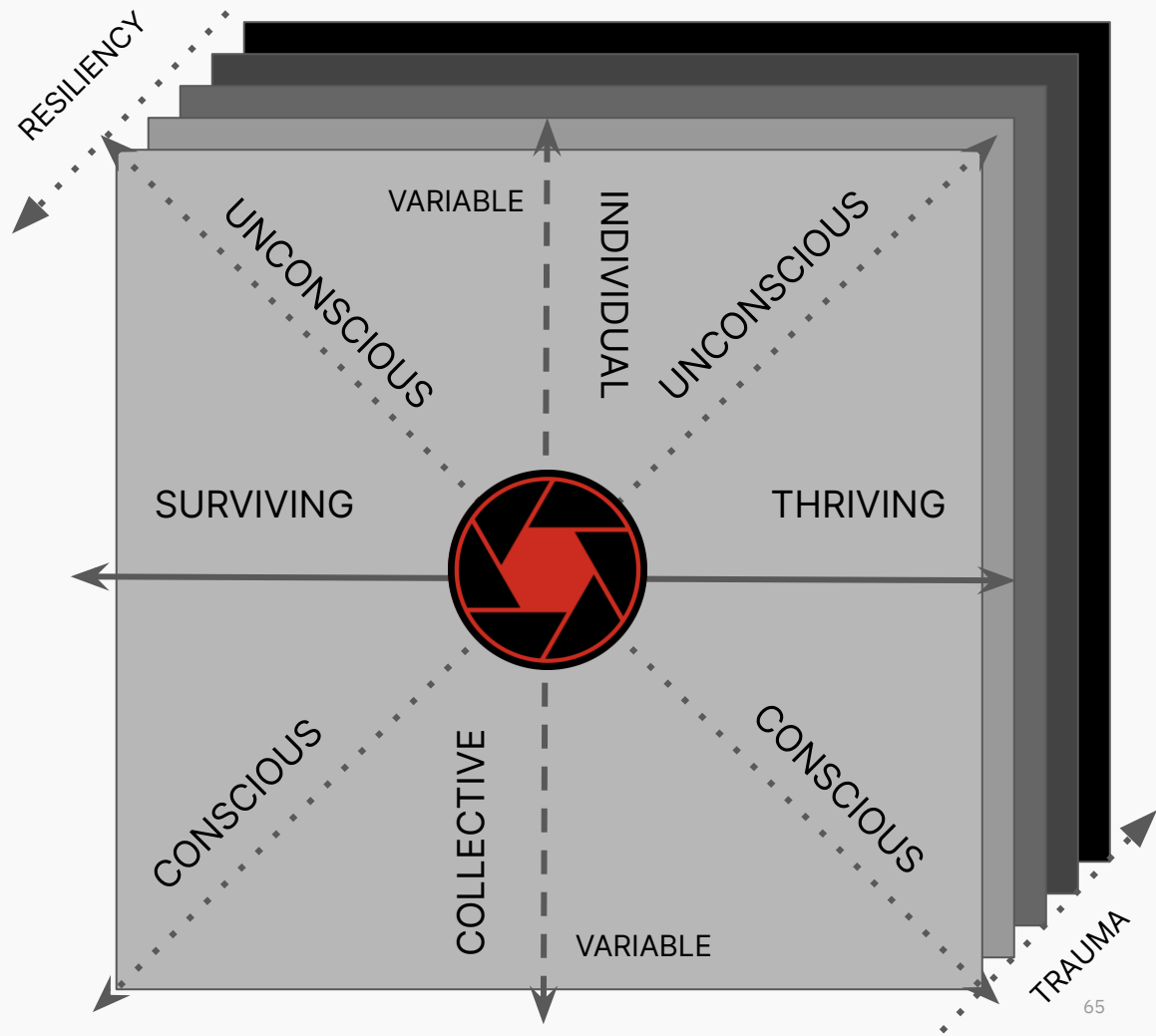
VISIBLE and VARIABLE SPECTRUM



INVISIBLE and VARIABLE SPECTRUM



With so many factors and behaviours being both variable and unseen, we consulted with our group of experts to ensure that our estimations were grounded in a likely reality. The Lens has been designed so that even with shifting moves across Eustress and Distress, or changes in focus from the Individual to the Collective, our Archetypes would remain relatively within the same groups and that they have enough overlap to avoid conflicting priorities.



Credits & Acknowledgements



WE WOULD LIKE TO GIVE OUR SINCERE THANKS TO OUR PEERS AND COLLEAGUES WHO TOOK THE TIME TO REVIEW THIS WORK AND PROVIDED US WITH THEIR INVALUABLE FEEDBACK THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO THE MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS WHO EXTENDED THEMSELVES AND SUPPORTED THIS PROJECT WITH THEIR ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE.

WHILE OUR EXPERTS DECLINED TO BE NAMED DUE TO THE EXTREME SENSITIVITY OF THEIR WORK, WE DEEPLY APPRECIATE THE CONTRIBUTIONS THAT THESE THERAPISTS, SOCIAL WORKERS AND PSYCHIATRISTS MADE, PARTICULARLY DURING A TIME IN WHICH THE NEED IS SO GREAT AND RESOURCES ARE UNDER PRESSURE.

WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO EXTEND OUR GRATITUDE TO [KIM ALPERT](#), WHOSE UNIQUE INSIGHT AND FORESIGHT AIDED IN INSPIRING THIS PROJECT.

THIS TOOL WAS PREPARED BY THE STRATEGY TEAM AT [THINKINGBOX](#) FROM JUNE THROUGH SEPTEMBER, 2021 AND FINALIZED ON SEPTEMBER 1ST, 2021.

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Erin Dafos
Ben Percifield
Nicole Wei

PLEASE NOTE THAT WHILE THIS DOCUMENT DOES CONTAIN LINKS TO ALL OUR ORIGINAL SOURCES, INFORMATION CHANGES QUICKLY AND UPDATED DATA, SURVEYS AND COVID-19 RECOVERY PROGRESS MAY REQUIRE ADDITIONAL RESEARCH FOR YOUR OWN USE.

CONSUMER DATA WAS GATHERED FROM, AND CAN BE UPDATED HERE:

IMI INTERNATIONAL

[CLICK FOR THE MOST RECENT IMI NEXTWAVE™ REPORT](#)

MCKINSEY + COMPANY

[CLICK FOR UPDATED MARKETING AND SALES INSIGHT REPORTS](#)

LEGER

[CLICK FOR THE MOST RECENT NORTH AMERICAN TRACKER](#)

PwC GLOBAL

[CLICK FOR THE GLOBAL CRISIS CENTRE'S MOST RECENT REPORTS](#)

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[PEXELS STOCK PHOTOGRAPHY](#)

[THE NOUN PROJECT](#)

THINKINGBOX TORONTO - AND OUR TEAM - ARE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO LIVE AND WORK ON THE TRADITIONAL, UNCEDED LANDS OF THE MISSISSAUGAS OF THE ANISHINAABE, THE HAUDENOSAUNEE CONFEDERACY, AND THE WENDAT. WE ALSO RECOGNISE THE ENDURING PRESENCE OF ALL FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT PEOPLE.



Thank you.

Every time is uncertain.

Let's navigate the future together.

Helen Androlia, Strategy Director

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