A PRACTICE GUIDE — FASHION AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

The Komorebi Playbook

Hiring for transformation — not just coordination.

Your job advertisements are the most honest document your company publishes. This playbook shows you how to read them — and how to rewrite them, so the people you hire can actually deliver the transformation your strategy promises.

Komorebi (Japanese) — the interplay of light and leaves when sunlight shines through trees. What this research does to job ads.

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Your job ads are leaking the truth.

Every fashion company now has a transformation story — circularity targets, digital roadmaps, sustainability pledges. But strategy is executed by people, and the most honest public record of what your company actually values in people is not your CSR report. It is your job advertisements: the document where you tell the market, in your own words, what you reward.

For my master's research, I analysed the job advertisements of roughly sixty fashion companies — sustainable pioneers, global leaders, GCC retail conglomerates, digital natives, and the companies most celebrated for transforming — and mapped what they ask for against UNESCO's eight key competencies for sustainability. The result was the same in every single group:

106

KEYWORDS FOR COLLABORATION

the number-one category in all five company groups

≤ 2

MENTIONS OF CRITICAL THINKING

at most, in any group — the lowest signal nearly everywhere

1

COMPANY WITH ANTICIPATORY SIGNAL

Patagonia — alone in the entire sample

0

SUSTAINABILITY ROLES ASKING FOR FORESIGHT

in any company analysed

Fashion hires for the competencies of **coordination** — collaboration, communication, interpersonal skill — and not for the competencies of **transformation**: anticipatory thinking, critical thinking, creativity, self-awareness, intercultural competency.

In other words: fashion is recruiting people to run the existing machine smoothly, at the precise moment its own strategy documents say the machine must be rebuilt. And the stakes have changed category — EU regulation (CSRD reporting, supply-chain due diligence, the ESPR destruction ban) has turned transformation from a brand promise into a compliance deadline. Every one of those obligations lands on a person your hiring process selected.

The next page shows the full pattern — and the three moves that belong to leadership. Part Two is the toolkit your people team can run in a week.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

PART ONE

The case

Pages 2 to 4 — the evidence and the five blind spots. For whoever owns transformation.

PART TWO

The toolkit

Pages 5 to 7 — audit, rewrite, embed. For HR and hiring teams. Runs in a week.

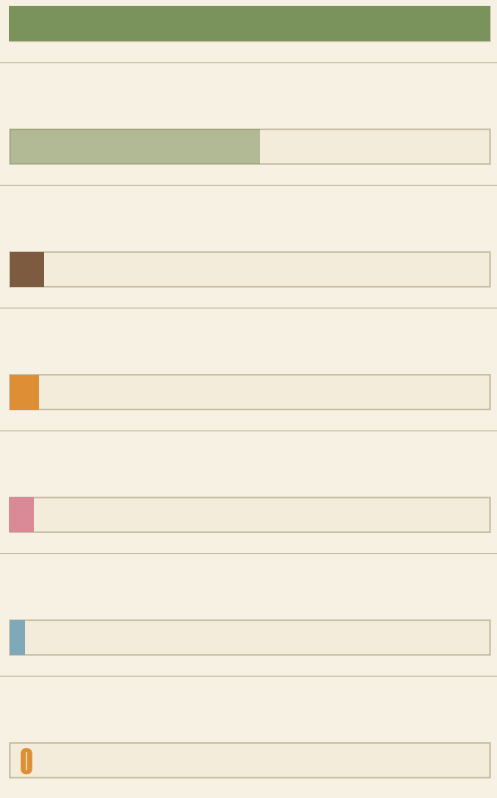
THE CHECK

One page

Page 8 — ten questions before any ad goes live. Print it. Keep it next to the template.

What sixty companies asked for.

One reading of the whole sample. Annotations are the findings; bar lengths are illustrative.



AND SINCE THE RESEARCH — TRANSFORMATION BECAME A DEADLINE

2020 — The research documents the hiring gap across all five company groups

2024 — CSRD reporting becomes mandatory; the ESPR enters into force across the EU

2026 — Destruction ban on unsold textiles begins — you are here

WHAT TO DO WITH THIS — THREE MOVES FOR LEADERSHIP

1 Read your ads as strategy.
They cost nothing to read and they cannot lie. If your strategy needs foresight and your last ten posts asked for none of it, the gap is upstream — in what you asked for.

2 Assume the gap is invisible.
Not one of the sixty companies was missing collaboration. The blind spots cluster exactly where nobody's template looks — across fast fashion and pioneers alike.

3 Hand Part Two to one owner.
The toolkit takes a week: audit, rewrite, embed. Give it to your HR or people lead — and ask to see the before and after.

The five blind spots.

What the industry does not ask for — and what each absence costs.

1 Critical thinking

WHAT I FOUND

Never more than two mentions in any of the five company groups — the lowest-scoring category nearly everywhere.

WHAT IT COSTS YOU

Nobody in the room is hired to question the norms your transformation is supposed to replace. Change programmes get executed, not examined — and 70% of them fail (McKinsey).

2 Anticipatory thinking & foresight

WHAT I FOUND

One single company — Patagonia — showed an anticipatory competency. Zero sustainability roles asked for foresight.

WHAT IT COSTS YOU

The roles created to carry you into a different future don't require the ability to think about the future. Regulation, material shifts and consumer change keep arriving as surprises.

3 Creativity & storytelling

WHAT I FOUND

Only two companies in the entire sample — both digital natives — named creativity or a creative mindset. Storytelling: almost nowhere.

WHAT IT COSTS YOU

In the industry whose product is creativity, the people hired to transform it aren't asked to be creative. Compliance data stays data instead of becoming brand story.

4 Self-awareness — beyond 'passion'

WHAT I FOUND

Reliably second place — but expressed as 'passion' and personal drive, not as the reflective capacity UNESCO defines.

WHAT IT COSTS YOU

Transformation starts within people. Leaders who don't know their own values can't align a team to new ones — the root cause behind most failed culture change.

5 Intercultural competency

WHAT I FOUND

Barely mentioned across the sample — in the most global industry on earth, in the same year its cultural missteps made headlines.

WHAT IT COSTS YOU

Supply chains spanning continents, run by teams never asked to work across cultures. The bill arrives as PR crises, vendor misunderstandings and homogeneous hiring.

A SIXTH, STRUCTURAL FINDING

Europe's sustainable brands often hire by referral instead of posting jobs. It finds kindred spirits — and quietly narrows the cultural and cognitive diversity transformation depends on. If that's you, Part Two matters twice as much.

Audit your last ten ads.

The same method I used in the research — it takes one afternoon.

1 COLLECT → **2 EXTRACT** → **3 MAP** → **4 SCORE**

1 COLLECT

Pull your ten most recent posts — include one leadership role and every role with 'sustainability', 'innovation', 'digital' or 'transformation' in the title. Use what candidates saw, not the internal brief.

2 EXTRACT

Highlight the three competencies each post genuinely asks for — behaviours and attitudes, not skills. A skill is Excel; a competency is 'builds trust across functions'.

3 MAP

Place each competency into one of UNESCO's eight sustainability competencies — the grid below.

4 SCORE

Count keywords per category. Your near-empty columns are your hiring blind spots. Write them down — Steps 2 and 3 close them.

THE MAP — UNESCO'S EIGHT SUSTAINABILITY COMPETENCIES

Systems thinking sees relationships and whole systems; handles uncertainty	**Anticipatory** ● evaluates possible futures; assesses consequences; foresight	**Normative** reflects on values; negotiates goals amid trade-offs	**Strategic** develops and implements innovative action collectively
Collaboration ● learns from others; empathy; handles group conflict	**Critical thinking** ● questions norms and practices; takes a position	**Self-awareness** ● reflects on one's own role, feelings, motivations	**Integrated problem-solving** applies all of the above to complex problems

● WHERE FASHION ALREADY SCORES ● THE BLIND SPOTS

One more reading: tone of voice. Read your ads aloud. Do they sound like your culture — or like anyone's ads? In my sample, US companies wrote with personality, European companies wrote minimally, GCC companies wrote formally — and the ads with personality attract candidates who self-select for culture. A job post is corporate culture in miniature: if yours could carry any logo, it recruits for no culture in particular.

WHAT YOU WALK AWAY WITH

The audit's output is one sentence: **we ask for X everywhere, and we never ask for Y.** Take that sentence to leadership — with Part One attached — before you rewrite a single ad.

Rewrite the ad.

Same role, same length — different signal. Adapt these; don't copy them.

ADD THE FUTURE — ANTICIPATORY / FORESIGHT

INSTEAD OF ~~*Stays up to date with industry trends.*~~

TRY “You read weak signals early — new regulation, new materials, shifting consumer behaviour — and translate them into what we should do next season, not next decade.”

INVITE CHALLENGE — CRITICAL THINKING

INSTEAD OF ~~*Works well within established processes.*~~

TRY “You question how we do things — respectfully and with evidence — and you expect us to take the question seriously. The status quo is not a protected species here.”

ASK FOR CREATIVITY — CREATIVE MINDSET AND STORYTELLING

INSTEAD OF ~~*Strong communication skills.*~~

TRY “You can take something complex — a supply-chain audit, a materials decision — and turn it into a story a customer, a colleague or a CEO actually wants to hear.”

HIRE FOR SELF-KNOWLEDGE — SELF-AWARENESS

INSTEAD OF ~~*Passionate about sustainability.*~~

TRY “You know why sustainability matters to you personally, and you can talk about a time your own values were tested at work — because this role will test them.”

NAME THE WORLD — INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY

INSTEAD OF ~~*Comfortable in an international environment.*~~

TRY “You've worked across cultures and you know that 'yes' means different things in different rooms. You listen for what isn't said — with suppliers, colleagues and customers alike.”

ONE WARNING FROM THE RESEARCH

Requirements screen people out silently. A senior leader I heard interviewed nearly didn't apply for the job she now holds — one requirement intimidated her, though everything else read as written for her; a referral rescued the hire. Audit every 'must-have': is it truly required, or is it filtering out exactly the transformative candidates you want? Write the ad so the right person feels invited, not examined.

Fix the system around the ad.

The ad attracts the mindset. The process has to recognise it — and the workplace has to grow it.

IN THE INTERVIEW — TEST FOR TRANSFORMATION, NOT RECALL

Most interviews test coordination (tell me about a time you worked in a team…). Add questions that surface the blind-spot competencies — and score the *thinking*, not the answer:

ANTICIPATORY	"What's a change coming to our industry in the next three years that most companies are underestimating — and what would you do about it in this role?"
CRITICAL THINKING	"Look at our sustainability page. What's the weakest claim on it? Argue against us."
CREATIVITY	"Here's a real, boring compliance requirement we face. Make it interesting — to a customer, in two minutes."
SELF-AWARENESS	"Tell me about a time your personal values and your employer's decision collided. What did you do — and what would you do today?"
INTERCULTURAL	"Describe a working relationship across cultures that went wrong before it went right. What was actually happening?"

INSIDE THE COMPANY — GROW WHAT YOU COULD NOT HIRE

Strategic foresight. Scenario work, trend analysis, futures thinking — builds the anticipatory muscle and ignites curiosity about where the industry is heading. It belongs in your L&D programme, not just in a strategy offsite.

Expressive-arts methods. Experiential, intermodal workshop formats drawing on systemic coaching — they build the deeper layer: empathy, authenticity, active listening, congruence between inner and outer self.

Together they target exactly the dimension conventional change management ignores — a plausible reason why 70% of change programmes fail: people never take part in the decision-making, never connect it to their own values, and never change behaviour.

FOR REFERRAL-HEAVY COMPANIES — KEEP THE DOOR, WIDEN THE DOORWAY

If you hire through your network (as most European sustainable brands do), keep the trust that gives you — but post the role anyway, state the competencies explicitly, and measure the diversity of your last ten hires: nationality, discipline, background. Kindred values and diverse perspectives are not the same thing. Transformation needs both.

The ten-question check.

Run any job post through this before it goes live. Aim for at least seven yeses.

1	Does the ad ask for at least one competency about the **future** — foresight, anticipation, scenario thinking?	☐
2	Does it invite the candidate to **question or challenge** anything — explicitly?	☐
3	Does it ask for **creativity or storytelling** in concrete, role-specific terms?	☐
4	Does it ask for **self-awareness** — reflection, values, knowing oneself — beyond the word 'passion'?	☐
5	Does it name **intercultural competency** where the role touches suppliers, markets or global teams?	☐
6	Does it distinguish **competencies** (behaviours, attitudes) from skills and qualifications?	☐
7	Does the **tone of voice** sound unmistakably like your company — would employees recognise it?	☐
8	Does it say something honest about **your culture** — what it's actually like to work here?	☐
9	Has every **'must-have'** been challenged — truly necessary, or silently filtering out the right people?	☐
10	If this ad were the **only public document** about your company, would it describe an organisation that is transforming — or coordinating?	☐

HOW TO READ YOUR SCORE

0 – 5	6 – 8	9 – 10
Your ads describe the company you were. Start with Step 1 and involve leadership.	Solid coordination, selective blind spots. Fix the future-facing questions first.	Your hiring language matches a transforming company. Keep auditing twice a year.

The research behind it.

This playbook operationalises my M.A. thesis — **Komorebi: shedding light on the importance of developing sustainable, transformative mindsets for leaders in the fashion industry** (Sustainability in Fashion & Creative Industries, AMD Fresenius, Berlin, February 2020 — passed with distinction). I analysed the job advertisements of roughly sixty fashion companies across five categories and mapped their stated competencies against UNESCO's key competencies for sustainability. The findings summarised here — collaboration's dominance, and the near-absence of anticipatory thinking, critical thinking, creativity and intercultural competency — held in every category, from fast-fashion leaders to sustainable pioneers.

The research summary and this playbook are at yasminbarakat.de — the complete study is available on request.

THE PERSON

I'm **Yasmin Barakat** — a sustainable-fashion strategist working across brand, retail and circular business models. Most recently I consulted in the UAE on projects including a festival marketplace built around reclaimed materials and an end-to-end uniform programme; before that I worked between the Gulf and Germany on market entry and circular design. I combine twenty years of creative-industry experience with design-thinking methodologies, strategic foresight and applied AI — and I read job ads the way auditors read balance sheets. I'm relocating to Germany in August 2026.

WANT THIS RUN ON YOUR COMPANY

The audit in Step 1 takes one afternoon with your last ten job ads. I deliver the competency map, the blind-spot reading, and rewritten ads for your three most critical open roles.

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