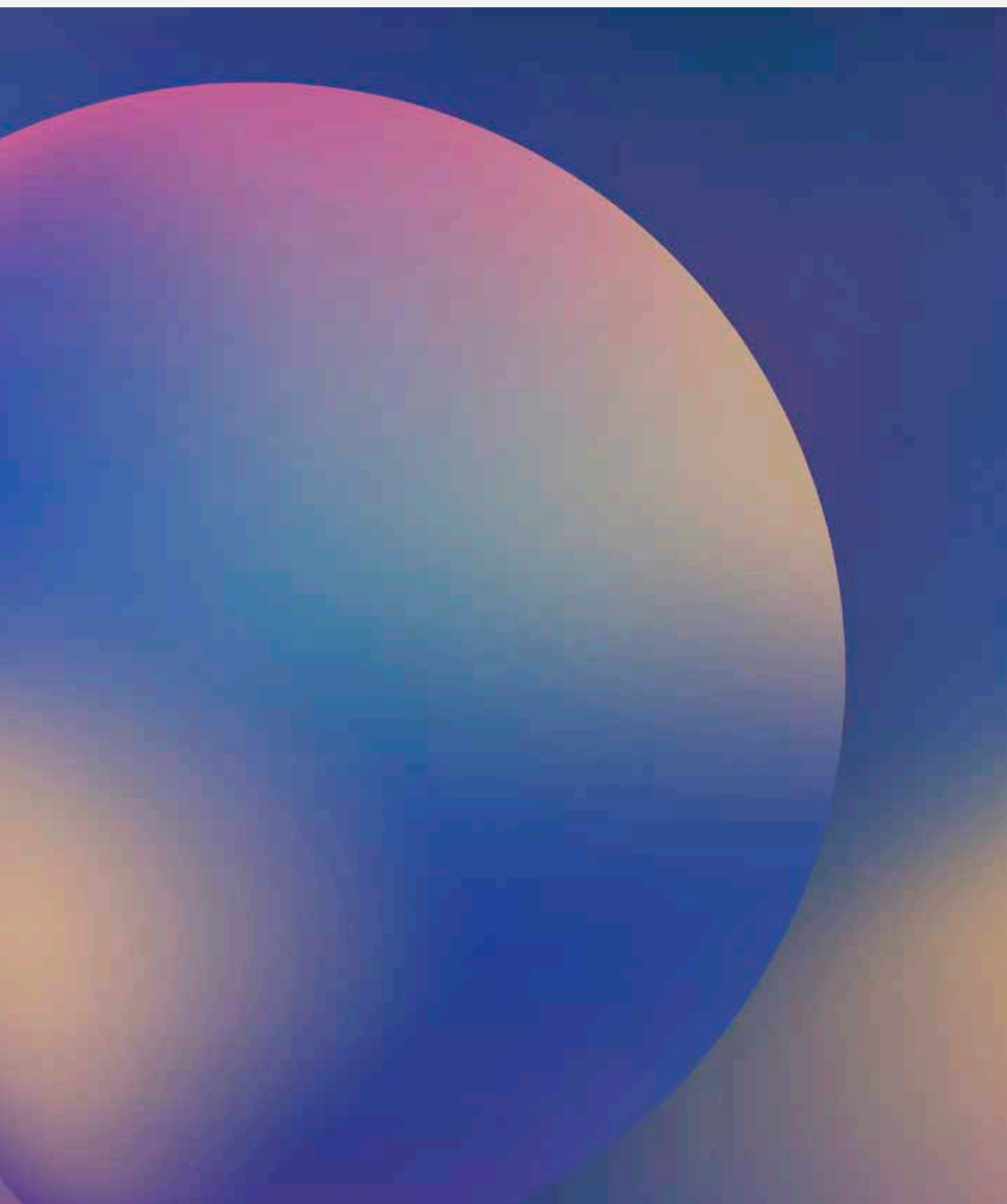




AUGUST

CULTURE HANDBOOK





CONTENT

What is a culture handbook and why do we need one?4

1 | “Once upon a time...”6

2 | The deepest roots of our culture 10

3 | The (not so) secret recipe22

4 | Our mentality26

5 | Our internal playbook28

6 | The look and feel of our culture34

Closing remarks39

Introduction:

WHAT IS A CULTURE HANDBOOK AND WHY DO WE NEED ONE?

Company culture is a curious thing. According to some, it eats strategy for breakfast, others describe it as an iceberg. Or an onion, or the wind, or a river. You name it. We agree (with all of these), and yet we feel that culture is something even more profound. We like to think of it as being *the* defining feature of any organization, the tone that sets the beat. As one colleague put it, “it’s what makes August August”. It’s a key source of August’s competitiveness and a key reason for why people join August.

CULTURE IS THE IMPLICIT CODE THAT UNCOVERS THE REASONS WHY WE AS AN ORGANIZATION BEHAVE AS WE DO.

Okay, so culture is important for us. But why on earth does a relatively small local strategy consulting firm need a *culture handbook*?

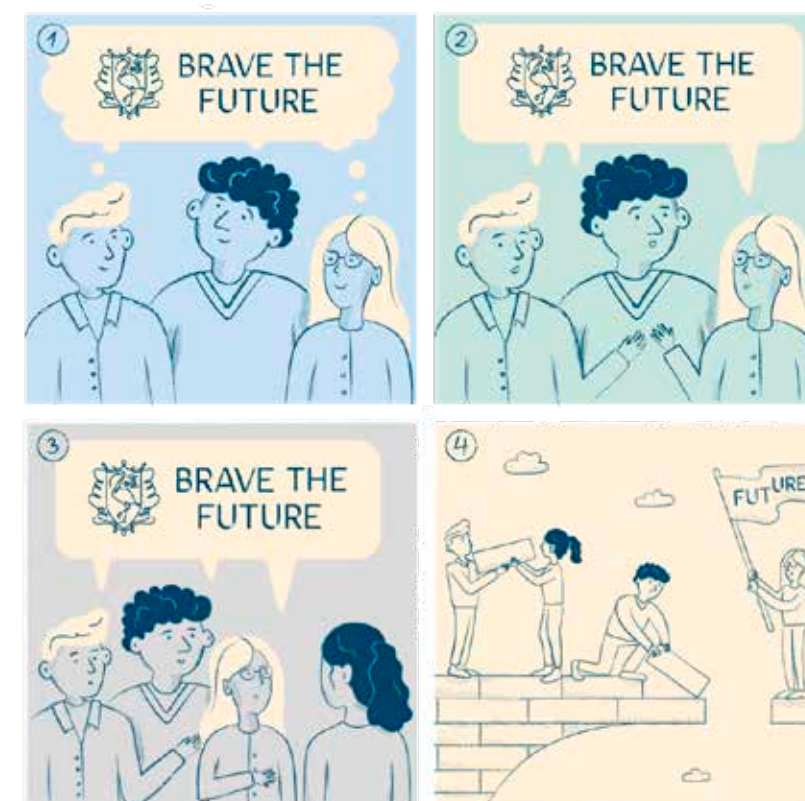
- ✓ We are proud of our culture (in a humble way, but nonetheless proud), and therefore *want to try to articulate* it despite the apparent difficulty.
- ✓ Creating the handbook *increases our awareness of key ingredients in our culture* and provides a basis against which we can reflect on how well we live and breathe our culture, or at the very least, provides context for debating or even challenging key ingredients among ourselves.
- ✓ Documentation is a *convenient way for conveying our culture to newcomers joining our team* and to candidates we are trying to recruit.
- ✓ It forms a *bridge from the past to the future*, providing an opportunity to preserve values, practices, and traditions that we hold dear while braving the future and renewing other aspects of the culture and the company.

There are some obvious challenges though in an undertaking such as this, due to the nature of the subject itself:

- It’s abstract (=not an exact science)
- It’s continuously evolving (=a moving target)
- It’s subjective (=communicated culture is never quite the same as experienced culture)
- It’s partly obscured (=not everything is visible at first glance)
- It’s not necessarily just “one size” (=there are sub-cultures)

Hence, even in a company the size of August it’s impossible to fully reflect the plurality of thoughts, opinions and preferences. The handbook is bound to merely be a blurred reflection of reality, a snapshot in time. The descriptions and examples will no doubt evolve over time – in fact, they must do so – thus they cannot be too rigid or detailed, but still sufficiently concrete.

This handbook is not really intended to be read as a manual (despite the name handbook 😊). It’s more of an attempt to shed some light on the contours of our culture. Ultimately its worth will depend on how useful you as a reader find it.



- This handbook can be useful, e.g.
1. When trying to remember what August was all about
 2. When trying to discuss what August is all about
 3. When trying to explain what August is all about
 4. When trying to build a bridge

1 “ONCE UPON A TIME...”

(i.e., where the August journey begun)

It all sprang from customer needs. The insight that sparked the creation of August was our belief (based on experience) that Finnish companies weren't getting the quality of consulting they deserved; August was the solution to this problem. The basic idea was to provide consulting services based on customers' true needs, not on the self-interests of consultancies. We envisioned the firm as an upright representative of high moral standards in the consulting industry. This vision plus a good amount of entrepreneurship resulted in the foundation of August.

In the beginning, August's approach to consulting was straightforward; carry out client projects with tremendous dedication and an entrepreneurial attitude. Our first few years were characterized, more than anything else, by extreme customer orientation. And by extreme we really mean it, to the extent that August's consultants were more dedicated to customers and their project teams than to August as a company. The essence of August's existence from the start was high quality project delivery and a high degree of customer orientation.

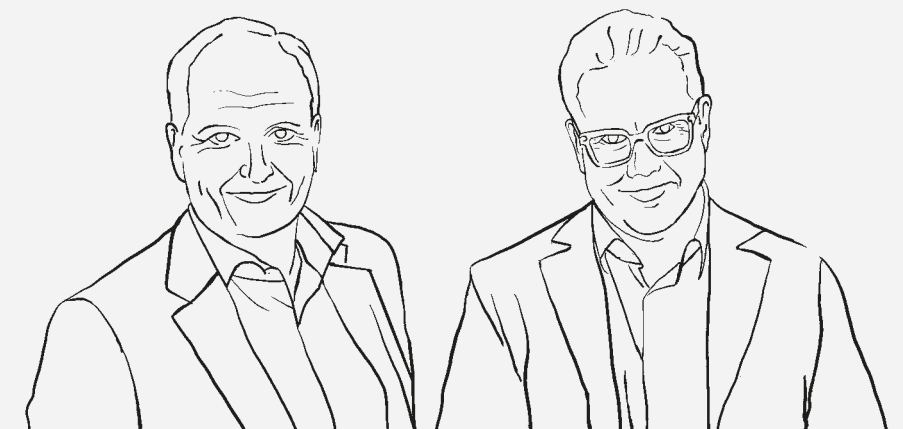
The people proposition was also unique from the outset and built on genuine caring, high professional standards, equality, and a relaxed atmosphere. Genuine caring manifested itself both externally and internally. Externally in the form of caring and strong commitment towards customer representatives we considered “good guys”, i.e., clients who aligned their personal goals with interest of their companies. Internally – as a key feature of August's culture – we prided ourselves on taking a genuine interest in individuals and safeguarding their wellbeing as being of self-evident importance. High professional standards led to a fair amount of work; client projects were delivered with high quality and an entrepreneurial attitude. These standards also shaped the

organization and had a bearing on who ended up staying with August for longer periods of time. An important counterweight to the intense work ethic was a relaxed atmosphere and spontaneous humor; among the most distinctive memories from the first years of business is of laughter echoing off the walls in the August office. Equality was also important, hierarchy was avoided in every conceivable way, and even hidden (for example, in the first few years, partner meetings were held in secret so as not to underscore titles).

Our dream from the outset was to advise our customers on the most important and interesting topics on their agenda (that's right, customers played a prominent role even in our dreams!). We also had a dream that August would become a respected institution in Finnish business life – a much higher ambition than just being a platform for us founders to practice consulting. Thus, August's internal development – creating processes and practices and securing continuity – was already on the agenda in the early years, although it was properly resourced only much later.

Looking back, of what we are most proud of from those early years is the courage we had to operate on the limits of August's and our own capabilities. We are also proud of having been able to combine highly demanding work with a great atmosphere, based on a shared ambition to deliver high-quality results. This spirit is absolutely essential in high-end professional services and self-evident at August these days.

Kai & Pasi
Founding Partners



A (VERY) BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE JOURNEY SO FAR

FOCUS ON SALES AND PROJECT DELIVERY

The company begins its activity in 2001, in the month of August of course 😊.

As for any start-up, the focus during first few years of business was very much on sales and project delivery.

BUILDING BASIS FOR PROFESSIONALISM

The identity/culture of the company begins to form, some of the core elements of the company culture (e.g., “enriching community”) date back to this period..

BREAKING INTO STRATEGY CONSULTING

August begins to seriously break into the strategy consulting space, by strengthening strategic capabilities through recruiting and expanding offering into new areas (e.g. commercial due diligence, sourcing). The customer base grows with several large customers and a significant leap in revenue occurs.

BUILDING THE PLATFORM FOR FURTHER GROWTH

The internal platform for growth was developed/ strengthened in several areas, including e.g., definition of internal processes, roles, and practices, and moving to a new state-of-the-art office.

STEADY FINE-GRAINED GROWTH/ DEVELOPMENT

This period was characterized both from a business perspective and also from internal perspective by continuous fine-grained growth and development, rather than major events or large transformational changes.

RENEWAL IN A CHANGING WORLD

Significant events both externally and internally fueled renewal in several critical areas of the firm, e.g., strategy, operating model, career model, ways of working, and office premises.

2001-2003

2004-2006

2007-2009

2010-2014

2015-2018

2019-2022

RANDOM FACT

In the early days, August had two major customers, one of which was Stora Enso. The long-lasting relationship started out with a project aimed at improving the quality of profit measurement.



RANDOM FACT

August started to make visible efforts to build the basis for professionalism, an expression of this was various articles/studies aimed at demonstrating thought leadership in topics such as e.g., financial target setting and corporate governance.

TULOJA OHAUSTA KEHITTÄMÄLLÄ

Mitä eroa on menestyvän yrityksen hallinnolla verrattuna epäonnistuneen yrityksen hallintoon? Corporate governance ympäristöä käsittelevä keskustelu perusteella tärkeä tekijä on hallintoyhteistyö. Käytännössä vaikutuksen laatu on kuitenkin hyvin usein puutteellinen yrityksen sisäisessä ohjauksessa. Näyttää siltä, että lähivuosina yritysten on panostettava merkittävästi sisäisen ohjauksen kehittämiseen.

Yrityksen sisäisen ohjauksen tehtävänä on auttaa toimintajohtajaa ohjaamaan yritystä omistajien haluamaan suuntaan. Alan kirjallisuudessa tästä on käytetty termiä sisäinen corporate governance. Yrityksen sisäinen ohjaus voidaan kytkeä kolmeen osaan:

- 1) strateginen suunnittelu,
- 2) organisaation suunnittelu ja ohjaukselliset sekä
- 3) taloudellisen läpinäkyvyyden varmistaminen.

Olemme tarkastelleet kunkin sisäisen ohjauksen osa-alueen tyypillisiä ongelmakohtia. Uskomme, että niiden tarkastelu antaa hyvän lähtökohdan sisäisen ohjauksen kehittämistyölle.

Kuva 1 - Yrityksen sisäisen ohjauksen osa-alueet

Strateginen suunnittelu
Organisaation suunnittelu ja ohjaukselliset
Taloudellinen läpinäkyvyys

RANDOM FACT

August started to become visible towards the “larger audience” via noticeable efforts in the marketing space, such as e.g. Consulting-Finnish dictionary and the A&B joint venture with ad agency Bob Helsinki.

RANDOM FACT

The recruiting model which is centered around the internship program and builds on close interaction with students that is still in use ten years later was put in place during this period.

RANDOM FACT

Important parts of the network of business intelligence/insight service providers that August relies on still today (what we call the “hub of expertise”) date back to this period, team augmentation becomes an increasingly common practice.

RANDOM FACT

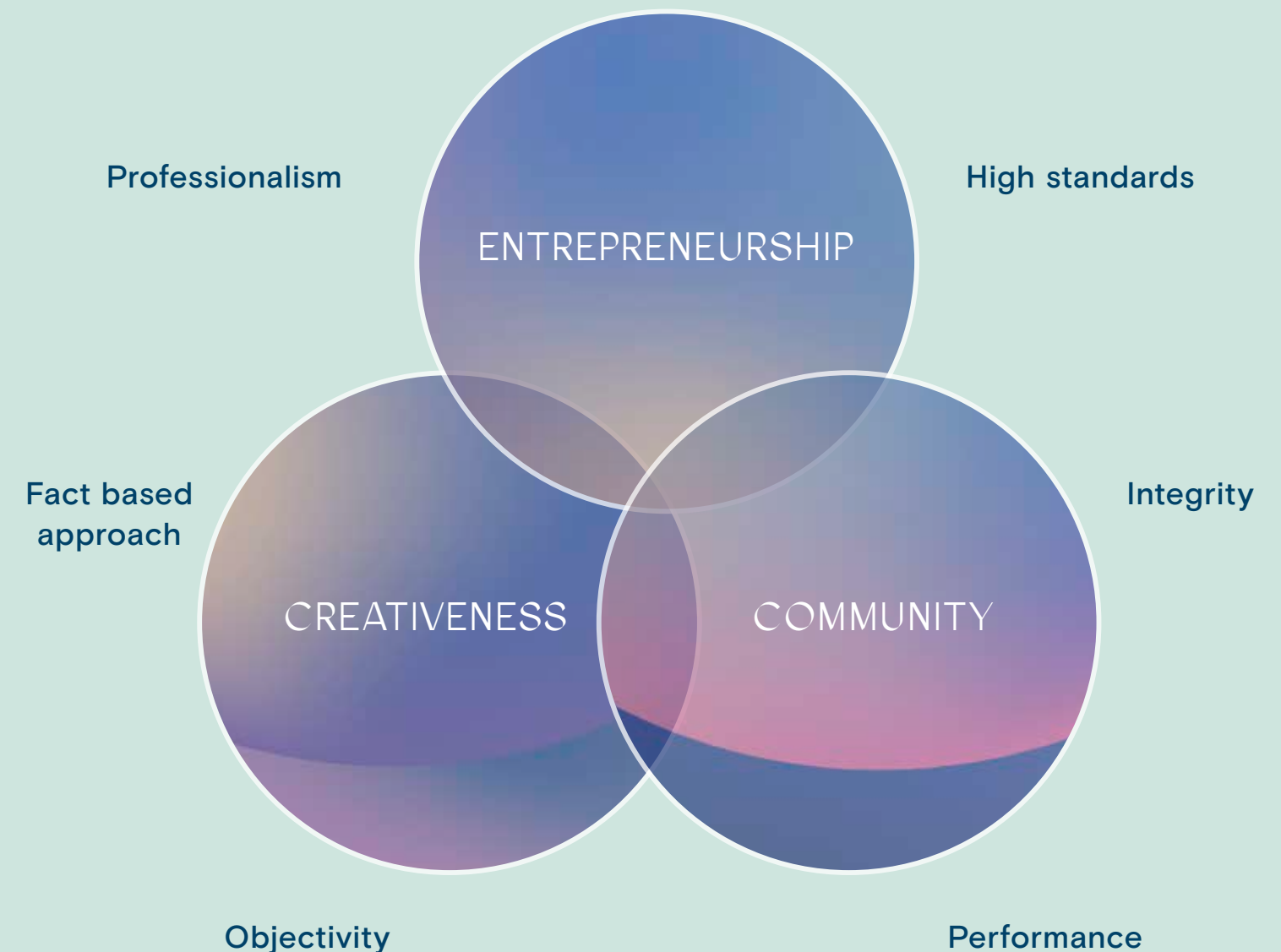
A symbolic “generation shift” in the partnership occurred in this period as the founders stepped aside from active duty.

2 THE DEEPEST ROOTS OF OUR CULTURE

(i.e. our core values)

August's three core values are **Creativeness**, **Entrepreneurship** and **Community**. They are neither new nor invented, they've been around for a very long time, some of them from the very beginning. The three core values focus on what is truly distinctive for August. Undoubtedly, our behavior is also to a very high degree influenced by the general standards of the consulting profession, such as professionalism, objectivity, integrity, and a fact-based approach. As consequence, August's core values must be understood as *supplementing rather than replacing* the more generic values of the profession.

The three core values have various interdependencies. They reinforce each other and provide checks and balances against one another. For example, Creativeness without Entrepreneurship can easily be unfocused, Entrepreneurship without Community can lead to self-centeredness, greed and insensitivity and Community is in many ways a pre-requisite for Creativeness. In other words, none of our core values is more important than the other; they should always be considered as a whole. The core values capture what we already are, but also represents an aspiration who we want to be in the future. They apply to each of us individually, and to all of us collectively.



CREATIVENESS

” ...THE CONTINUOUS PURSUIT OF DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY, BETTER.

Creativeness might not be the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about strategy consulting. However, we believe that great results, unique solutions, and agile processes cannot be achieved without creativeness. In fact, *we believe creativeness is exactly what consulting requires* to be successful.

Creativeness at August is not about artistic creativity, revolutionary ingenuity or transformational innovation (we are neither artists nor inventors 😊). It's far more mundane; it's a continuous everyday pursuit of doing things (large or small) in a different, better way. Creativeness is fueled by resourcefulness and effort. It's about finding new angles and approaches in every project (and any other undertaking for that matter), not just executing tasks and analyses according to plan. Tailoring solutions to customer needs and the situation at hand is a self-evident starting point for us. We strive to deliver the best possible results, and solutions that address true customer needs. In addition, we are proud to find the answers to questions that our customer did not necessarily even think of asking.

Creativeness is a great source of positive energy in problem-solving as it questions conventions and “the usual way of doing things”. It pushes us to develop.

WE BELIEVE THAT CREATIVENESS IS NURTURED BY SENSITIVITY, DIVERSITY AND OPENNESS.

SENSIVITY + OPENNESS + DIVERSITY
= CREATIVENESS

SENSITIVITY towards client needs is critical both in developing our offering and in planning and delivering the projects. It means approaching people, situations and information with a sensitive ear -- and with both eyes open. We don't push “the right answer” as we understand and accept the incompleteness of our own perspective. We are curious to hear what customers have to say, and always take their views into account in our actions.

OPENNESS to explore and engage external parties to contribute to our work is paramount for creating something novel. We cannot see any advantage in acting as if we were perfect in everything we do or know everything ourselves. Rather we acknowledge that there are, and will be, areas of expertise where we are better off relying on external parties to supplement our own knowledge. We actively engage external experts and perspectives both in our customer engagements and in developing our own company.

DIVERSITY is a critical source of creativeness and inspiration. Diversity at August is not about affirmative action or educational quotas in recruitment. Rather it is the recognition that, to be creative and reach the highest levels of performance, we need to be open and inclusive and continuously bring new ingredients into the mix. Therefore, we embrace the fact that every individual has their own background, personal approach, and way of thinking.

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES OF OUR CREATIVENESS VALUE:

- ✓ Agile adoption of new tools based on our junior colleagues' initiative
- ✓ Trying out novel ways of reconciling financial figures in complex raw material calculations in a situation where all obvious solutions had been exhausted
- ✓ Pitching a major project to large financial institution by drawing on the master's thesis of a junior colleague
- ✓ Drawing inspiration from other industries in modernizing our operating model and practices
- ✓ Expanding recruiting efforts to entirely new educational areas without anyone actively asking for it
- ✓ Engaging external experts (substance or methodology) in key roles in project delivery
- ✓ Adopting a brand identity that lends inspiration from completely different sources than traditional consulting
- ✓ ...and at least one example of artistic creativeness: Entertaining rap performances (with elaborate lyrics) by a group of colleagues¹ at company events



The Consulting-Finnish dictionary published in 2008 is a past example of creativeness in a marketing context. An unintended but positive consequence was that the book ended up being stocked on the most famous bookstore in Helsinki.

¹ The group was called Marakatit and the #1 hit was “Ibikset on ikuisia”.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

” ...AS IF IT WERE MY OWN COMPANY.

You need to own a business to call yourself an entrepreneur, but you can show great deal of entrepreneurship without owning one. Entrepreneurship at August means a passion to deliver superior results to clients, passion to build our company, and an opportunity to enjoy the advantages of smallness.

Entrepreneurship has been in August's DNA since its inception. Had it not been for the entrepreneurship displayed by August's founding partners, August would never have been founded. And had in not been for the other entrepreneurially minded companions who joined later, we would not be where we are today. August sprang from great enthusiasm about creating something new and different in a market that was quite content with what was already offered by a set of competitors which – by any standards – rank among the most formidable one can imagine. It was idealism, not stone-cold rationality, that sparked the creation of August. And perhaps more important than anything else was a passion to deliver superior results, partly through brilliant new thinking, but above all thorough hard work and dedication, a passion that has forged August's way from where it all started to where we are today.

Relative to our peers, we are even at the age of 20+ years still a young company and still significantly smaller. We believe that size does matter, however – contrary to the conventional meaning attributed to the phrase – we believe small can be a competitive advantage.


$$\text{PASSION + EMPOWERMENT} \\ = \text{ENTREPRENEURSHIP}$$

The thrill of not just delivering an outstanding project, but also experiencing at the same time quite concretely how delivering that specific project pushes August forward as a company. The privilege of being able to relate to August as your own company, instead of having to be preoccupied with maximizing your own individual interests in a large organization. The joy of finding your role as a critical organ in the creature that is called August, and realizing that by putting our collective bottom-line first, we all come out as fuller persons.

With entrepreneurship comes a sense of personal responsibility. This can take different forms, such as putting in more effort when needed, going the extra mile to win a proposal, representing the company in client events that are important or throwing yourself fully and wholeheartedly into discussions with recruiting prospects when opportunities arise, to mention a few common examples. The key is identifying the critical moments when we must throw ourselves into the work with all our energy. A positive counterweight to this is a degree of autonomy that comes with entrepreneurship, which we also get to enjoy. Successful delivery of tasks – in time and on quality – matters, not when or where they have been completed.

WE BELIEVE THAT ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS ROOTED IN PASSION AND EMPOWERMENT.

PASSION is above all the desire to deliver superior projects and build a great company. We believe that a deeper commitment to the client is an essential part of being an outstanding advisor. Talent, expertise, and skills are all important, but without passion – manifested through energy, dedication, and perseverance – people will always fall short of the full potential. We are passionate about what we can achieve for our clients and accomplish as an organization; we are energized by the knowledge that any of us can leave a significant mark – not just on the client, but also on our own company. We give our best in all situations, not because we want to look good as employees or get a good evaluation, but because we want to succeed as a team.

EMPOWERMENT means the ability to delegate and willingness to take on responsibility. We believe that when we give talented young people enough opportunity and space, we see a remarkable step-up in responsibility and ownership. For us, formal titles are less important than attitude. This means that we don't sit around and wait for orders. If we believe something could be good for the client and/or for August we proactively roll-up our sleeves, pick up the phone, and make things happen.

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES OF OUR ENTREPRENEURSHIP VALUE:

- ✓ Commercial campaign (“brave the sales”) with the entire organization eagerly taking part
- ✓ Operating model where everyone has power to make company decisions
- ✓ Compensation model where surplus is shared among the entire organization
- ✓ A similar enthusiasm for driving leads generated by others as leads generated by oneself
- ✓ Junior colleagues having full power and responsibility in a strategically important area, student recruiting
- ✓ People at different levels stretching beyond their own role description when necessary – e.g., an analyst passionately developing ComEx capabilities or a partner assuming project manager responsibilities when needed
- ✓ Greeting clients and other guests in our lobby as warmly as if they were visiting our own home
- ✓ Proactively driving improvements when one sees need for them (rather than waiting for somebody else to fix it)

BLAST
FROM THE PAST



“A&B”, a joint venture launched in 2007 together with ad agency Bob Helsinki, is past example of entrepreneurship in action. A&B was a creative combination of management consulting and marketing services, with the mission to support companies in the capitalization of opportunities in areas such as e.g., new business identification and brand strategy development. The idea behind A&B gained initial traction among customers, but the ambitious targets set by the founding companies were not met and after two years the joint venture was shut down.

COMMUNITY

“ ...IN SICKNESS AND
IN HEALTH.

In our view, individualism is old fashioned. To develop and go forward, we must share knowledge, ask questions, and stay curious towards one another and also in relation to the surrounding world. Openness and genuine care for the members in the community builds trust and creates a supportive atmosphere, which is the bedrock for creativeness. Everyone stumbles at some point – without exception – but knowing that we “never leave anyone behind” gives us courage to go on. Knowing that everyone plays by the same rules and towards a common goal means that there is no need to keep elbows high.

For us, community is above all a platform for unleashing our full potential. It’s a surrounding where you can be your true self and feel appreciated. Community is not limited by the boundaries of August as an entity; it also includes our clients, business partners and others. Nor is it limited to the office or work hours; it involves spouses, after work activities, and friendships among colleagues and clients – both current and former.

**WE BELIEVE COMMUNITY SPRINGS FROM CLASS,
APPRECIATION AND ATTRACTIVENESS.**

CLASS + APPRECIATION + ATTRACTIVENESS = COMMUNITY

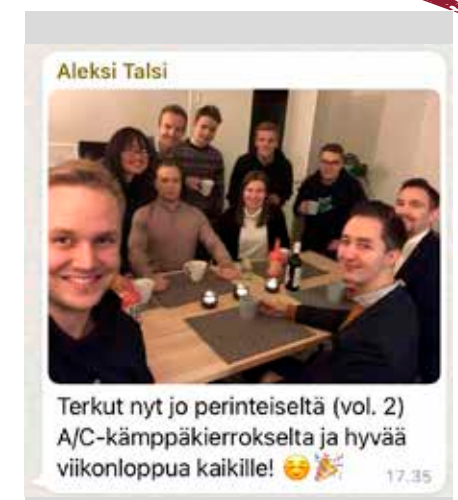
CLASS involves a strong moral sense. Class is doing the right thing when nobody is watching, even if it's much harder. Class is taking the side of the weaker party when nobody else will. It is avoiding showing off even when you can. Class means having zero tolerance for any prejudice, bias, retaliation, harassment, abuse or toxic behavior related to gender, age, sex, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, education or physical appearance. It is having a categorical no-asshole rule, which cannot be outweighed even by the highest levels of performance. It means showing compassion and respect, and trying to find flexible and constructive solutions even in circumstances where one of us is struggling, whether professionally or personally.

APPRECIATION of each other motivates and encourages us to always give our best. Appreciating one another for who we are – regardless of title or role – gives us a sense of pride and belonging. We make efforts to make everyone feel included no matter the differences between us in gender, background, culture or interests. Winning teams do not consist only of players who are good at scoring; they consist of players that enjoy building opportunities for others to score.

ATTRACTIVENESS makes us a desirable community to join. No community can remain vital over time unless it is considered attractive by its key stakeholders. We are proud of having long relationships with employees, clients, and business partners. It gives us assurance that we are doing something right, but also puts pressure on us to rise to the standards and remain attractive in the future.

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES OF OUR COMMUNITY VALUE:

- ✓ Not cheating or bullshitting even a little, regardless of how small the likelihood of getting caught is
- ✓ Saying no to opportunities that might provide a short-term gain, but feel like a “gray area”
- ✓ Welcoming interns as fully fledged team members and involving them in client interaction at the earliest opportunity
- ✓ Responding with standing ovations when colleagues candidly and bravely share their life stories
- ✓ Friendships formed between spouses of colleagues
- ✓ Social events where you can sense that August is something more than just a workplace (such as skiing trips, crayfish parties, Christmas parties, half-marathon runs, golf tournaments, alumni parties, and afterwork parties)
- ✓ The wholeheartedness that echoes from our floorball team shouting “AUGUST” before a game
- ✓ Office ping pong tournament with everyone participating
- ✓ Actively paying tribute to colleagues in moments of joy and showing compassion in moments of sorrow



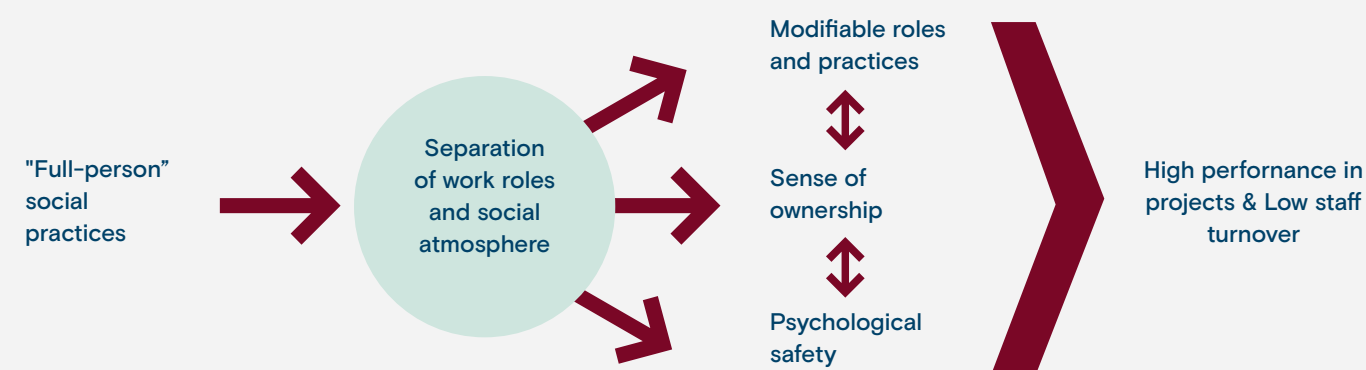
Community has traditionally been fostered in many different ways at August, e.g., pre-Christmas event for kids, crayfish-party with spouses, “kämpäkierros” (i.e., apartment crawl) among younger colleagues.

3 THE (NOT SO) SECRET RECIPE

(i.e., our culture-driven performance equation)

We take our company culture so seriously that over the years we've had different experts looking into it more systematically. One of the most useful and eye-opening perspectives was provided by an external advisor in 2016. Based on input gathered through extensive organizational interviews, the key features and causalities that explain our performance as an organization were outlined in what we call our organizational performance equation.

AUGUST'S ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE EQUATION



Since the Industrial Revolution, people have been taught to separate “work” on one hand and “leisure” on the other. The norm and expectation in our society has been that people behave in a certain manner and according to a certain role and expectations when “at work”, while having the freedom be their true selves in their “leisure time”. The expectation is that when you go to work, you put on your “working mask”. We see this quite differently. In fact, the starting point for our organizational performance equation is something we call **“full-person” social practices**. These are different types of practices where *people are engaged as whole persons* rather than merely as workers or professionals. It’s about recognizing that human beings are human beings, and behaving accordingly. Some of the practices are perhaps less explicit or indirect (e.g., regular social events with spouses/avecs, company-wide friendly competitions in areas unrelated to work, work-unrelated pictures in the hallway), while others are more explicit or direct (e.g., explicit concern about people’s well-being, perception that founders wanted to create a caring firm). Central to these practices is the idea that they portray each person as an individual with a full life and concerns. These practices help colleagues at August see each other as fellow human beings, fostering a sense of being completely respected not just as a colleague but as an individual.



Our people pictures have also evolved from strictly professional towards a more full-person look and feel.

What follows from this is that when people feel respected for who they are, they can **separate their work roles and social atmosphere**. In practice this means that it is possible for a meritocratic order and social equality to co-exist, despite being seemingly contradictory. Meritocratic order refers to fact that roles in project teams are typically very clear (even in some respects hierarchical), which enables efficient performance of the project at hand.

But it does not affect the social dynamics of the organization, which is characterized by a positive atmosphere and a lack of social hierarchy. As someone put it: “when you’re sitting in the team meeting and the project manager / partner gives you advice or guidance, it is wise to listen closely to your experienced colleague’s advice, but when the meeting ends, and you step outside and walk to the kitchen, you can joke brutally with that same person you just a minute ago in the team context perceived as an authority.” That pretty much captures the essence of this second part of the equation.

The separation of work roles and social atmosphere in turn fosters three phenomena that also reinforce each other:

Modifiable roles and practices refer to the fact that there are clear processes and roles in place for each person, but at the same time, people can influence these processes and roles by making clear and logical arguments or decisions. The processes and roles enable coordination and effective performance when “the game is on”. On the other hand, the ability to modify the practices, “between the games”, enables organizational learning, as people have time to reflect how things work and how they could work better and improve their performance for the “next game”. It facilitates adaptability and agility, because when people are willing and able to stretch upwards or downwards from their current role when necessary, it opens up more opportunities for us as a team. It also fosters a sense of ownership – when you can influence how the company works, it feels more like your own.

Sense of ownership is rooted in a strong sense of community generated by the social atmosphere. People feel they are working towards the common good and therefore want to help each other. Their commitment towards the organization is high and people identify themselves with the company. (This is also a good example of our Entrepreneurship value at work, i.e., treating August as if it was your own company.)

Psychological safety refers to a culture that is safe for inter-personal risk taking. In a psychologically safe culture, people are willing to try difficult things, admit when they fail or don’t know how to do things, and ask for help. This is how we prefer it. Psychological safety is important for learning, as without it, people would hide their mistakes and/or not try difficult things. It’s the bedrock of our Community value.

This is all very nice, but what does it do for the business? A lot, it turns out: **high performance in projects and low staff turnover.**



One example of how we are trying to operationalize elements of our performance equation into business practices is our people development processes and roles, which include, e.g.:

- *Placing the individual firmly in the driver’s seat in relation to personal to promote sense of ownership*
- *Assigning every individual a personal mentor whose role is to support personal growth and strengthen sense of psychological safety*
- *Periodic structured reflection throughout the year (“between the games”) to stimulate modifiable roles and practices*

4 OUR MENTALITY

(i.e., our slogan and brand persona)

Like any other grown-up company, we also have an official slogan as well as a brand persona that an ad agency has helped us put together. But unlike many companies, we are actually very fond of these, our slogan in particular. In fact, we're so fond of it that we're not at all embarrassed to wear hoodies with a company logo and our slogan printed in large font. On the contrary, we do so proudly 😊.

BRAVE THE FUTURE

Brave the Future is our battle cry. It is our statement about how we view the increasingly complex world and how we propose to transform its challenges into opportunities. It's about looking beyond the obvious, aiming above the established standard, and delivering more than the expected. It's our approach to everything we do: our culture, our analysis, our processes and our solutions.

Oh, and it's also made its way into our daily vocabulary, with a unique translation to Finnish of the verb brave (fin: breivata) 😊.



THE AUGUST BRAND PERSONA:

In addition to being a key ingredient in our slogan, **brave** is also the inner core of our brand persona. The outer layers of our brand persona consist of the following characteristics.

FIRST IMPRESSION (i.e., the things you could expect to catch your attention or arouse your interest):

Straightforward – fun, candid, and sincere – likes to see the constructive side of things.

Doer – a pragmatic cosmopolitan, with a capacity for self-irony.

Engaging – attentive to others and surroundings, stirring all to join in on the action.

Sharp – takes the initiative and sees things to their conclusion.

DELIVERED EXPERIENCE (i.e., features that we hope will earn your affection and respect):

Competent – goal-oriented achiever, who turns challenges into opportunities.

Farsighted – grounded in the big picture, conscious of long-term results.

Compassionate – capable of observing things from various angles and aims at creating a wider benefit.

Trustworthy – trusted partner guided by principle, easily weathering adversity.

Since our brand ultimately is the sum of our behavior, the list above describes the features you should expect to see if met a person called August (or run into anyone of us).

5 OUR INTERNAL PLAYBOOK

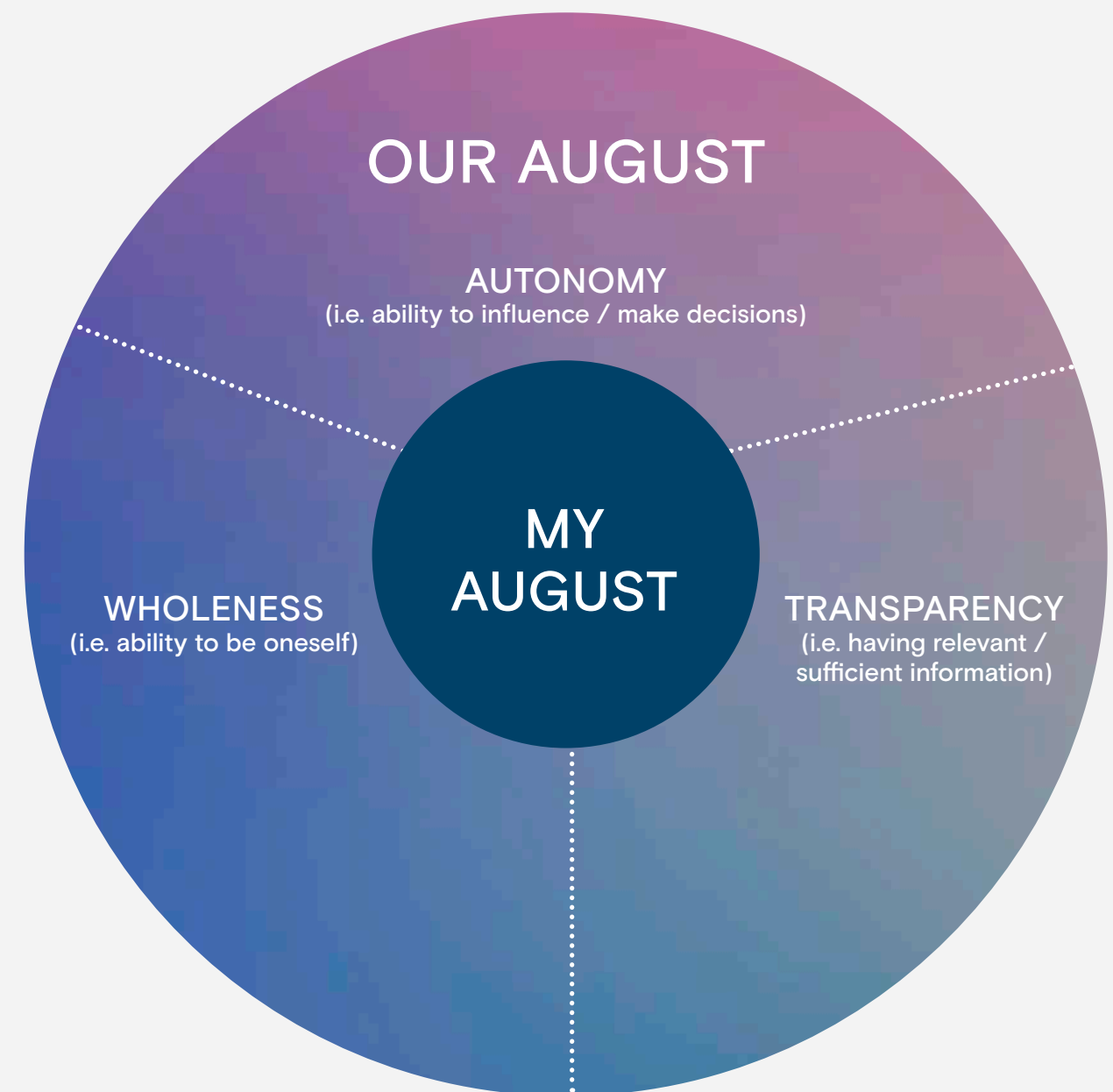
(i.e., how we operate)

Culture is not just values, unspoken phenomena, or collective behavior, it is also shaped by “hard infrastructure”: how the company is run, how decisions are made and responsibility split, what information is shared, how communication occurs, and so forth. In short, *culture is influenced by the operating model of the company.*

Up until a few years ago, we were convinced that the intelligent direction in which to develop our operating model was to create more structures, processes and clarity, in order to reduce uncertainty and make everything as efficient as possible. We were developing our organization into an *efficient machine* (proverbially). This was what conventional wisdom told us to do, what we would read about in management literature, and the standard practice in our industry. This was all fine, until we discovered that in doing so, yes, we do get clarity and efficiency, but at the expense of vitality, initiative, and a sense of autonomy.

By lifting our eyes beyond our own sandbox (the convention of the strategy consulting industry), we realized that we could do things better, to build the company on a different set of operating principles. Nowadays, we rather look for inspiration and examples about how to operate more from the likes of technology or software companies than from traditional management consulting or professional service industry. With the objective of empowering people and making more effective use of the collective potential embedded in the organization, we’ve made a change of direction that emphasizes three principles: **autonomy, transparency and wholeness.**

MY AUGUST WITHIN OUR AUGUST



AUTONOMY

Autonomy means the ability to influence / make decisions in matters that concern you. While the degree of autonomy in client work has always been high at August, in recent years, we have aimed to strengthen autonomy in matters related to our company. We've tried to approach this not in the conventional incremental way, e.g., by providing more opportunities for people to influence decision making, but rather by *actually giving people power*. We have altered the power structure by cutting back on the traditional top-down (management- or partner-driven) authority and decentralizing decision-making power and the responsibility that comes with it to everyone in the organization. Simultaneously, we aligned the incentive model with the idea that *power=responsibility* so that they always go hand in hand.

One concrete feature of this decentralization of power is that it has given everyone the right to make company decision by following our **advice process (3x2)**. The idea behind this is pretty simple: you are free to make decisions on *almost any matter*² provided that you observe one important content principle and one important process principle before you make your decision.

- ✓ The content principle is the following: you need to consider the impact of the decision on 3 different aspects in 2 different time dimensions: our *clients*, our *people*, our *numbers* (3 aspects), *now* and *in the future* (2 time dimensions).
- ✓ The process principle is that *you have an obligation to hear / seek opinion from the persons who are affected by the decision*. In relation to the latter, it is worth noting here that seeking advice does not take the power away from you, nor does it give the person giving advise the right to veto³, and decision-making does not require consensus. You hold the power to make the decision, and carry responsibility for the decision, the advice process simply aims to help you make decisions better.

It may sound drastic that anyone can decide almost anything just by following those guidelines, but we think it makes a lot of sense, for several reasons. 1) It is deeply ingrained in our company DNA to believe that people by nature have the will and capacity to make good, fair, and transparent decisions. 2) We recruit not just talented and intelligent people, but also people with a great sense of responsibility who possess excellent judgment and have the ability to make sound and responsible business decisions. 3) In a bureaucracy where you must spend time and energy asking decision makers for permission or lobbying for a certain outcome, you lose valuable time. 4) The ones best suited to make good decisions are those persons who care most about the matter or those whom the decision has an impact on and who have the practical

experience and understanding of the issue at hand. 5) It taps into the organization's collective decision-making potential and extends the range of outcomes beyond those preferred by a chosen few.

Okay, fine, but what about the really big decisions? Things like, what is our strategy? what kind of office space do we have for the next X years? Surely these types of decisions can't be made by one random person simply following the advice process. That is true, in part at least. So how are they decided then, still in the conventional way (i.e., by management)? Nope. Okay, by the partners then? Nope. We decide on them all together, with everyone having their say.

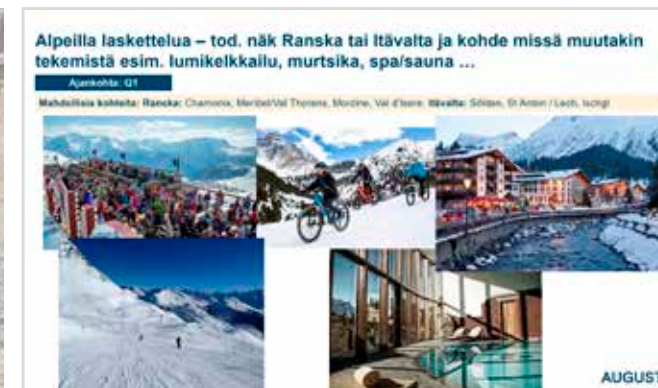
(We should note here that we are in the early stages of our journey, and still getting used to the advice process, but so far the experience has been encouraging.)

Our advice process (3x2) has drawn inspiration from both literature (e.g., Reinventing Organizations) and other companies (e.g., Futurice, Fraktio). This is an example of where we've adopted ideas from outside the strategy consulting industry to fit our context and culture.

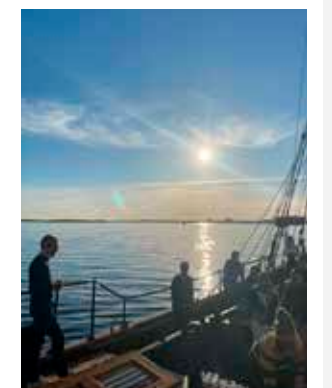
Recent examples of decisions that people have made following the advice process (3X2) include, e.g.:



A consultant taking initiative and deciding on the procurement of a new set of displays for the entire office.



A group of junior colleagues taking initiative for organizing a spring trip abroad for the entire company (incl. deciding where to go, when and for how long).



A team of analysts and consultants deciding annually on the strategy, budget, time allocation and activities for recruiting and employer branding.

² There are some exceptions to this, for example matters that relate to the legal responsibilities of the company or one a person and in matters that relate to securing business continuity.

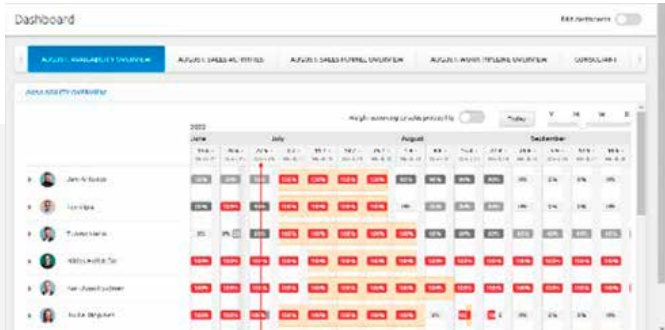
³ As an exception from this principle, the MD and/or the Board has a right to veto decisions in matters for which they carry legal responsibilities and in matters that relate to securing business continuity.

TRANSPARENCY

Transparency is about everyone having relevant and sufficient information about things, so they know what is happening, feel included and can make wise decisions. While transparency is by no means a new phenomenon at August, we have taken steps in recent years to push the envelope even further. Some concrete examples include:

- ✓ Creating operative dashboards where not just the person(s) responsible for staffing but everyone in the organization has real-time transparency and view of staff availability, our sales funnel and upcoming projects as well as our task list.
- ✓ Annual walk-throughs with the entire organization of the fundamentals of our economic formula and breakdown of the P&L (as supplement to the monthly reviews of top-line performance, KPI's and sales funnel outlook). There are no hidden expenses or budgets.
- ✓ Opening decision making forums for everyone to listen in / attend. In addition, notes from internal meetings (e.g., operative management meetings, partner meetings) are posted on the intranet.
- ✓ A strategy implementation tool where all information related to how well we execute our strategy is open for everyone to read and edit.

These are just a few of the most recent manifestations of our decision to make transparency our default strategy – that is, to *share all information where there is not a specific strong reason not to share it*. This doesn't mean that everyone knows everything about everything. There are situations and topics where full transparency is outweighed by other important reasons (e.g., legal or contractual commitments, or personal information related to other people), but these are exceptions.



The creation of operative dashboard was a concrete step to provide equal transparency to everyone within the organization into relevant operational information, such as availability, sales funnel and work pipeline etc.

WHOLENESS

Wholeness is about the ability to be fully oneself. This is not a new thing for us, as mentioned in the description of our performance equation, full-person social practices have always been an integral part of the August culture. But in recent years we've made new and increasing efforts to embed operative practices that allow people opportunities to experience wholeness. While wholeness as a principle is far less concrete than autonomy or transparency, it is no less important. It manifests itself in variety of different ways, e.g.:

- ✓ Authenticity in outside appearances, i.e., things such as how people dress at work (=the way they like to), how we design our office (=a warm environment that we enjoy).
- ✓ Sharing personal stories as part of our monthly meetings (and not just the glossy Instagram versions).
- ✓ Altering our mentor model to put the human relationship front and center.
- ✓ Embedding personal growth as a key objective in our career model and mentoring.
- ✓ Rotating responsibilities for hosting weekly and monthly company meetings that give the host a full mandate to shape the agenda according to his or her own preferences.

Our operating model is by no means complete. What we have described in this chapter are merely small but concrete steps in the direction that we've taken to emphasize autonomy, transparency and wholeness. It's work in progress, and there's no doubt we will need to take more steps.

Sharing our life stories and learnings with our colleagues is an example of a practice that has been adopted, and subsequently become a tradition, with the aim of fostering a sense of wholeness.

Ajatuksia matkan varrelta:

Unelmia kannattaa jahdata, mutta niitä varten pitää olla valmis tekemään töitä

Kontrolli omasta elämästä on illuusio

AUGUST

6 THE LOOK AND FEEL OF OUR CULTURE

(i.e., artefacts, traditions and other random stuff 😊)

Culture is also visible, as one colleague put it, “it’s things like the content of the office fridge, how we dress and what our office looks like”, so, we felt it could be good to add a section to this handbook about the more visible stuff, our material culture:

LOGO: A natural starting point would be perhaps the most visible thing of all, our logo.

Why is there a bird in August’s logo, and what bird is it anyway? It’s the sacred Ibis, a wading bird of the family Threskiornithidae. In ancient Egyptian society, the Ibis was worshiped as the god Thoth. Thoth, whose head is that of an ibis, is the ancient Egyptian god of wisdom and reason, and thus of truth, knowledge, learning and study, and writing and mathematics. The Ibis was considered the living incarnation of Thoth on earth. What on earth could be more suitable than this for our logo?



OFFICE: Another highly visible thing is of course our home base, i.e., the office. In 2021, we decided to leave our lofty but not necessarily very functional or cozy office on Aleksanterinkatu behind us and design something braver, an office fit for future. And so, we moved all the way (and a full 300 meters) to Kasarmikatu.

We wanted an office that:

- ✓ Radiates quality and purposefulness
- ✓ Has a warm and welcoming look and feel
- ✓ Is functional with different types and sizes of spaces for different purposes (silent team rooms, small rooms for virtual meetings, large rooms for client meetings, a large lounge and kitchen for social gatherings, mezzanine spaces for casual working, and so on)
- ✓ Has something surprising / extraordinary (e.g., two balconies and one ping-pong table)
- ✓ Is a place where people enjoy spending their days

DRESS CODE:



...at the client site



...at a company party



...at a partner retreat



...when meeting your mentor



...at the office among colleagues



...when in Lapland

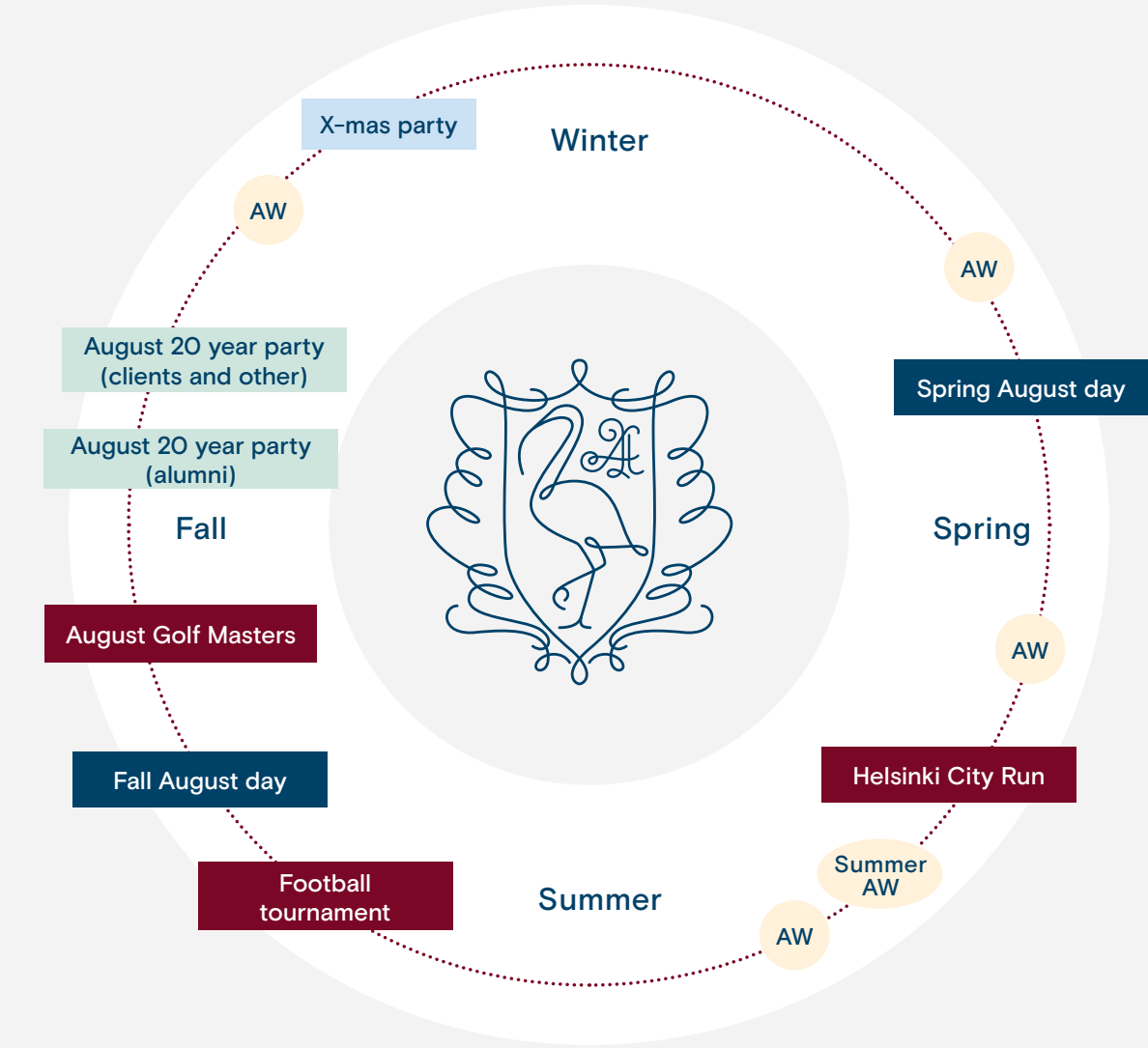


...at the Spring trip gala dinner

We used to have a formal dress code, but over the years it has simply faded away. Nowadays the implicit dress code could be summarized this way: wear whatever you feel comfortable wearing given the situation. In client or other external meetings, this typically means smart outfits, but when just among ourselves, it's anything from a hoodie and shorts to a suit, depending on your own preferences.

OFFICE ROUTINES: Friday breakfast, August weekly, Community lunch, monthly August afternoon, pingpong/table ice hockey, office yoga, ...

INSTITUTIONS AND EVENTS: Weekly and monthly gatherings with the entire organization. Spring trip abroad. Crayfish party with spouses. Christmas party with spouses. Annual golf tournament. Annual runners team participating in half marathon. To name a few.



August social event calendar 8/2021-7/2022.

TROPHIES: Aah... we really like our trophies. Every trophy has its own distinctive context, origin and tale. There's the oldest one, the *Golf Masters* trophy, which since 2004 has been awarded to whoever wins the annual August Golf Masters tournament. There's the *Stanely Cup* (named by and after our alumni Taneli) which is awarded to the winner of our internal table hockey tournament.

There's the legendary *Espa Cup* trophy from 2018, when the small but feisty August team went undefeated in a floorball tournament for professional services firms in Helsinki. And there's the most recent addition, the *ATT trophy* which is awarded to the winner of the August Table Tennis Tournament. Finally, there's the *Pasi Torppa trophy*, awarded annually to a person who has demonstrated entrepreneurship, one of the most coveted honors one can imagine at August.



Pasi Torppa trophy

CLOSING REMARKS

That's it. Hope you enjoyed reading, hope you found the handbook useful, and most importantly, hope it raised thoughts and spurred emotions.

This is the first edition of the handbook, but by no means intended to be the last. Imagining that our culture is "ready" or "settled" just because this description is ready would be a colossal mistake, merely documenting things do not make them complete or perfect. What content future editions of this handbook will contain, and how our culture will evolve from here on is up to each and everyone of us. Including you. And that's precisely the beauty of it.



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