

Komorebi

Japanese — the interplay of light and leaves when sunlight shines through trees

Shedding light on sustainable, transformative mindsets in the fashion industry — an exploration of what companies actually hire for, read through their own job advertisements.

M.A. thesis, Sustainability in Fashion & Creative Industries — AMD Fresenius (University of Applied Sciences), Berlin · February 2020 · passed with distinction (1.3 / A) · examined by Prof. Dr. Ingo Rollwagen and Marte Hentschel · summary prepared by the author. Full thesis (191 pages) available on request.

The question

What the research set out to learn

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| In one line | How far are sustainable, transformative mindsets — and the competencies behind them — already taken into account by leading fashion companies as they hire for the industry's sustainable and digital transformation? And where are the blind spots? |
| Why it matters | Sustainable transformation starts with people. Circular models, transparent supply chains and green claims are all executed by humans — so who a company hires, and what mindset it hires for, quietly decides whether its sustainability agenda is real. The most honest public record of what a company truly values is its job advertisements. |

The approach

Reading the industry through its own job ads

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| Method | Competencies were extracted from real job advertisements across three groups — sustainable fashion brands, large fashion companies, and the digital players reshaping the industry (drawing on McKinsey & Business of Fashion's State of Fashion) — then mapped in a matrix against UNESCO's key competencies for sustainability, alongside an analysis of each ad's tone of voice. |
| The lens | If a competency matters to a company, it should appear where the company asks for people. The gaps between what transformation requires and what job ads request are the industry's blind spots. |

The findings

What fashion companies ask for — and what they forget

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| Most demanded | Collaboration is the most requested competency across all job posts, with communication second — the industry knows its work is done in teams. |
| Blind spot 1 | Intercultural competency is barely mentioned — in an industry whose supply chains, teams and customers span the globe. The most international business on earth rarely asks for the ability to work across cultures. |
| Blind spot 2 | Creativity — the competency underlying all of UNESCO's sustainability competencies — hardly appears, and storytelling almost never. Self-awareness, critical thinking and anticipatory thinking are similarly close to invisible. |
| Blind spot 3 | Not a single sustainability-focused role analysed asked for foresight — the very skill of understanding where the future is going, without which a company cannot steer toward it. |

What companies should do with this

From findings to practice

Job ads are culture

A job post is corporate culture in miniature and often a candidate's first encounter with the company. Written authentically and transparently, it attracts the mindsets a transformation actually needs — written as a keyword list, it repels them.

Hire for the future

Embed anticipatory and creative thinking into recruitment — and develop existing leadership through methods such as strategic foresight and expressive arts, which build the self-awareness, empathy and communication that sustainable change runs on.

The thesis behind this summary spans 191 pages: a mindset-theory foundation (from growth mindset to the global cosmopolitan mindset), the full job-ad competency matrix across dozens of companies, and detailed recommendations for HR, innovation and sustainability teams. It is available on request: yasminbarakat@gmail.com

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