

The Future Front

An insightful book that looks into the future of business communication and the corporate landscape

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Preface

This is a book that looks to the future and offers insight into what business communication and operations will look like years from now.

It covers key business areas that all companies will need to consider, from organisational structure and innovation to environmental policy.

Experts in their relative field present a picture of now and then; predicting what the 'working environment' is likely to look like 10 years from now.

Being agile, with the ability to respond to a rapidly changing way of working will be key. This book will enable individuals and organisations to plan and prepare for the changes in the business landscape leading up to 2023.

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The here and now – recognising the changes in business

The framework of business today is driven by the customer.

The long-term success of a business depends on how it adapts to a changing environment, like great advances in technology, employee influence on company performance, public attitudes and perceptions having more effect, a blurring of work/home boundaries, a mix of generations in the workplace who are also customers, and different purchasing patterns. Organisations need to understand each and every customer, have knowledge of local markets and run engaging internal operations. Being in a position to drive forward new, effective ways of working is essential to keeping not only customers but colleagues happy. Businesses need to have vision, recognise trends, be proactive in nature, and have the ability to respond to situations quickly.

In theory it is an ideal that is simple enough to achieve but the reality for many is that it's hard to fulfil. This is primarily because we have become so time poor and caught up in dealing with the here and now that we cannot think about how the business will operate and what the market will look like 5–10 years in the future.

This book has been developed to help tackle this issue. It offers insight into the future of business communication and operations. And covers key areas, from employee behaviours and organisational structure, to innovation and environmental policies.

Every chapter covers a different area, has been written by an individual qualified in that particular field, presents a picture of now and then, and predicts what the 'working environment' is likely to look like 10 years from now. This valuable information provides insight into what the business landscape will be in the future. It enables forward planning and encourages further thought around your operations in 2023.

The employee rules

Organisations are continually competing for success. In 2023 competition will be tougher and companies will be under more scrutiny than ever before.

Customers will have greater choice and will find it increasingly difficult to make buying decisions. The shrewd organisations will recognise that their staff are the first and most important customers in helping external customers choose their company over their competitors. It's people that sell products and services. If your people are treated well customers in turn will reap the benefits.

Imagine an organisation where your staff prefer to buy from the competition or they recommend a competitor brand to their colleagues, family and friends. All too often organisations forget how simple it could be to improve overall performance through their own staff.

Data from the Corporate Leadership Council suggests that less than 20% of staff in most organisations are giving maximum effort. Roughly 70% 'just do the job', giving only the effort they have to, while 10% affect colleagues negatively. Those who 'just do the job' could potentially give their organisation 30% more 'discretionary' effort if they wanted to. Even if they performed not 30% but 15% better, it would totally transform company performance, and quickly.

The key question is why aren't they? The answer lies with the leadership team. Leadership more often than not isn't good enough. And a big part of the problem is poor communication. An individual's decision to give high performance is 57% rational and 43% emotional. So presenting a logical case for high performance or change alone without emotional inspiration doesn't work.

Employees need to believe in the company brand and what it stands for so they can connect to a higher reason for doing what they do. In 2023 strong leadership will be paramount and leaders and line managers will need more support in helping engage people in a way that resonates with them and combines rational and emotional thinking. Sharing the rationale for business decisions isn't enough. Staff will want to feel engaged, inspired and involved.

Another key consideration will be that by 2020 Millennials – those born in the late 1990s – whose focus is on connectivity, communication and collaboration, will make up 40% of the population in the USA, Europe and BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China). Organisations will need to support leaders and line managers in delivering more engaging ways to communicate with Millennials and the way they interact, shape and change their own learning. This will be heavily influenced by technology. Communications will need to stimulate conversations and two-way dialogue and at the same time ensure there is a coherent and consistent approach as a company's employees are often its customers, investors and shareholders.

In the future, employees will become internal 'information customers' – choosing what messages they want to listen to within the business; basing their choice on the reputation of the source; taking recommendations from colleagues and discovering information

through channels such as internal social networks – replicating the model that is already beginning to emerge outside organisations, where external stakeholders choose what information to listen to based on criteria such as how compelling a corporate narrative is, its level of sincerity and the reputation a brand possesses.

The prediction is that employees will become ‘information junkies’ and conversations will be driven more by technology. They will exist in ‘real time’ but become more informal in nature. This will make the old organisational structure and communication channels obsolete as employees overtly choose to by-pass them, and instead choose to listen to people who have a good reputation and equally have something interesting to say.

The most successful organisations and most profitable will be those that invest in their people and have the best leaders to motivate and inspire. It’s people that sell products and services and only through clear, rational, emotional and compelling communication will employees be able to deliver at the highest levels and feel compelled to give more discretionary effort.

Work-life balance

What is it and can we attain it in the 24/7 21st century workplace? Or do we need a different approach?

The advent of cloud computing and the inexorable growth in the use of mobile devices with faster 4G connectivity are creating a challenging dichotomy unique to 21st century organisations and their employees: on the one hand, this recently developed technology has given many of us greater freedom about how, when and where we work as we become increasingly undocked from a specific workplace location and time-frame. On the other hand, is this freedom illusory? Are we becoming increasingly enslaved by the technology that is meant to serve us, as more of us join the ranks of those on-call 24/7? Is the concept of work-life balance now outdated and has it rendered our notion of 'working to live, as opposed to living to work' obsolete? And what exactly is work-life balance? Is it even relevant in the 21st century particularly in organisations that operate across multiple time zones and cultures? In an increasingly joined-up technological world, is the old model of 9–5 working and 5–9 living now consigned to history?

We examine these questions and provide some suggestions to create a 'win-win' scenario benefiting individuals in the rapidly changing world of work while helping organisations achieve their goals too.

So what exactly is work-life balance? According to Wikipedia's dictionary definition:

'Work-life balance is a concept including proper prioritising between 'work' (career and ambition) and 'lifestyle' (health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development/meditation).'

This definition assumes that 'work' time must be flexible to give more time to 'life' time and vice versa and that there is tension between the two. The implication being that there is only one specific point where they are in balance: that as we move away from that very specific point we face increasing levels of dissatisfaction, frustration and anxiety leading to stress and an inability to cope, and if ignored, depression, damaged relationships, physical and mental ill-health and ultimately complete breakdown. Many of us attend to the roadworthiness of our cars better than our own health! Do you? Ask yourself: how realistic is it for any of us to be at this one specific point of balance consistently over time? Are we setting ourselves up to fail? Is this model really helpful in the 21st century?

With the freedom and potential enslavement that mobile technology has given us in the last few years and its associated blurring of 'work' and 'life', is an alternative model better suited to life in the 21st century – 'the integrated life'? This is a life that comprises several different elements, which will be more or less important to us depending on our own individual needs and preferences and what life stage we are at. Instead of aiming for one specific balancing point, we can rate each of these elements on a scale of 1–10 in terms of our level of satisfaction/happiness – or wellbeing as the Office for National Statistics called it in their recent survey 'Measuring National Well-being – What we do, 2012' (www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_258996.pdf). The elements are:

- Work/career/vocation
- Personal relationship
- Family

- Friends
- Social/community
- Physical health
- Pastimes/hobbies
- Financial health
- Religious/spiritual
- Mental/intellectual stimulation
- Other – specified by the individual

Choose a specific date in the future – like a birthday or anniversary – and set a realistic target on the same scale at that date. Next, choose one or two elements to give more focus and attention. Finally, identify a couple of manageable actions that will achieve that score. This way we can make our lives feel more integrated, giving a sense of personal responsibility and control over our own particular situation.

There is clearly a responsibility on organisations too. Research by Kenexa Research Institute in 2007 shows that those employees who were more favourable towards their organisation's efforts to support work-life balance also indicated a much lower intent to leave the organisation, greater pride in their company, a willingness to recommend it as a place to work and higher overall job satisfaction. As a point of strategic advantage, such enlightened employers will:

- have a clear vision that connects with employees, so that their work has purpose and value and they feel they belong
- have a defined set of values and aligned behaviours
- encourage employees to be true to themselves
- allow more flexible working arrangements, including a cap on maximum hours worked
- provide training, mentoring, coaching programmes

There are particular challenges facing us all – whether leaders or followers – that could adversely impact on our wellbeing in the 21st century:

- Flatter structures
- Teams that cross time zones, cultures and work/home locations
- Teams who aren't all 'in the office' on the same day
- Teams comprising baby boomers and Millennial members with differing attitudes, wants and needs

This is where technology such as Skype, video-conferencing, virtual-conferencing, social media, intranets, texting and email can serve rather than enslave. Harnessing this technology can help address these particular challenges and the task is made much easier when employees at all levels are aligned to the values and behaviours of the organisation.

Much of the technology that has led to the blurring of work-life boundaries is the brainchild of visionary, entrepreneur and Apple founder Steve Jobs, who sadly died in 2011. Perhaps it's fitting to end with a few words of his:

'Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it...'

(Stanford University, June 2005)

The fight to keep and retain talent

The baby boomers who powered the commercial engines of the post-war developed economies are beginning to head off into retirement, so how are companies going to find the next generation of experienced talent?

It's a situation which businesses, large and small, are starting to confront as they begin to face a shortage of skilled workers. The solution lies in how they attract and retain talented employees in order for them to continue to achieve success. What they do now will impact on their success in 2023 and well beyond.

For many companies the starting point is the domestic employment marketplace, which may lead to them fighting over scarce resource in some kind of 'talent war'. A more effective route may be to look outside of local boundaries, tapping into the global talent pool.

However, recruiting in a global environment can present its own set of challenges. Your company's brand may be unfamiliar to potential recruits; cultural barriers may need to be overcome; and attractive and appropriate remuneration and reward systems will need to be developed.

In terms of recruiting there are a number of steps you can take to address these issues, which are:

Identify your needs It may seem obvious but before starting to recruit in a global environment take time to define the specific skills and experience you are looking for. What qualifications are required, and how do they compare to domestic equivalents? What experience will the right candidates need to have had in their previous roles? Do candidates need language proficiencies etc?

Find the right talent pool Once the above needs have been identified you need to consider how to reach the right talent pool(s) of potential candidates. A multi-channel approach is likely to be the best option. As well as using the services of global and on the ground recruitment experts many companies are also tapping into social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn to 'seed' job opportunities into these environments and find networks of like-minded people.

Focus on your culture as well as the business facts Don't assume that everyone in the world has heard of your company and how great it is. Companies need to develop an employee brand, which can be used to position their business in the local environment, setting out why potential employees should consider embarking on a career with them. When appealing to new recruits, as well as focusing on company track record and strategic ambitions, showcase the talent that already exists within your business.

People may join the company because of its reputation but one of the top reasons people decide to leave is 'my boss'. Does your company have the right internal culture to attract and retain the right people? Research quoted by Schon Beechler, academic director of Duke Corporate Education, states that the top five priorities for workers are: the boss, challenge, learning opportunities, responsibility and respect (*Global Talent and the Next Generation Workforce*: Tuck School

of Business at Dartmouth, 2008). And these results are nearly identical between employees in India and the US.

So you've worked hard and hired the ideal candidate into your company but it doesn't stop there as you need to ensure that all of the time and resource invested in the recruitment process isn't wasted by a poor induction programme. A well thought through and executed on-boarding programme can:

- help to increase the retention of new employees in the first year of employment
- provide consistent group-wide messages across the organisation
- enhance the company's brand
- accelerate the productivity of any new starters
- enhance engagement levels of new employees
- enable new starters to get up to speed with the organisation and their role as quickly as possible.

The best way to create a memorable, seamless and impactful induction programme that can be applied in a consistent way across the company is to take a phased induction approach to avoid information overload and provide thoroughness and flexibility in the way new employees can learn, make decisions and excel in their effectiveness.

The first 90 days for any new employee is a key period of learning, which if managed well leads the employee to proactive, rather than reactive activity. The right induction process can minimise business disruption, while accelerating the integration and improving the performance of newly placed individuals.

The employee journey Before employees start is an ideal time to get organisational information to them and establish a baseline of knowledge. By sending key information to the new starter before their start date it sends a message that the organisation is preparing for their arrival and genuinely cares about them getting up to speed.

All good induction programmes have a clear beginning and a clear end. Week one should be all about set up, month one about getting knowledge and gaining more clarity on the role, month two is where the culture becomes clear and relationships have been formed. The final stage is about wrapping up the process and the business transition, ensuring that the talented individual you've fought hard to recruit is making the best possible contribution to the success of your business.

Three generations in the 2023 workplace

How can any organisational philosophy speak compellingly to such disparate cohorts?

A century ago, most of us lived in multi-generational households. Fast forward to 2023, and we are living increasingly atomised lives. No longer living in extended families, we only bother to follow those on social media we're interested in, and we tend to seek out web content confirming our own prejudices. Our main experience of differing lives comes via the continuing popularity of television soaps and structured reality programmes, or in terms of real contact, at our workplaces. Arguably, it's the workplace where the different generations will mostly meet and have to rub along together in 2023 – they are the new extended family.

In fact, workplaces are a living slice of contemporary history. Think of those in their 20s in the 2023 workplace. Born in the late 90s, Millennials spent their teenage years in a decade of austerity. Hamstrung by tuition fees, they see little prospect of owning their own home for the foreseeable future, and they are expected to work for free as interns for months in order to have any chance of a proper job. So they won't take their careers for granted. And of course, their use of technology is becoming simply an extension of themselves: personal and public boundaries are increasingly blurred.

At the other end of the spectrum, baby boomers are considered to have it all. They will be in their 60s and 70s in the 2023 workplace. Younger colleagues will envy their substantial equity in their own homes, and

their pension provision. But baby boomers won't see it like that. Given the ever increasing retirement age and resultant crashed pension expectations, the workplace in 2023 will have more people in their 60s and 70s than for some time. These baby boomers are working longer than they thought they'd have to. So they are skilled to the hilt, but in danger of being resentful and anxious about retirement.

And in-between sits Generation X, those children born in the punk era who turned 18 just as New Labour took to power. Now in their mid-40s, no longer rebellious, shaped more by family commitments than age, they are largely settled at work, but in danger of being taken for granted.

Most organisations have staff that span over 40 years of attitudes, history, lived experiences and skills. Leaders routinely talk of the cliché 'people are our greatest asset': easily said, less easily meant. And if the baby boomer approaching retirement is simply not the same as the Millennial entering the workplace, how on earth do leaders engage with such disparate motivations and experiences? As we look ahead to 2023, what should the enlightened bosses of today be thinking?

One entirely wrong answer is simply to focus on the future generation: the Millennials. Bosses are often tempted to ignore the baby boomers grumbling on the sidelines as past it, and a time limited problem. A less wrong-headed answer is to segment engagement approaches, much as a business would do: one organisational philosophy and engagement approach for one age group, something else for another. At its most reductionist: social media techniques for those in their 20s, the odd meeting for those in their 60s and 70s. Well, up to a point.

Technologies change, attitudes change, skills change. But the trick is to find the universal truths that endure, and speak to those. Every human

being wants to feel that the work their organisation does matters; that they can see where their individual contribution fits in, and that they are valued and are allowed a sense of worth. In this respect, the 25-year-old of 2023 will be no different from the 65-year-old. Leaders in 2023 will need to do the following:

Make a virtue of three generations in the workplace Workplaces thrive when different skills and experiences flourish – monocultures breed complacency. Consider the very different values and experiences of the different generations an asset to be nurtured:

- Ensure that older workers have a great experience at the end of their careers by talking to them about the transition, and using their experience to mentor and develop others
- Give a platform to the younger workers to share their ideas and to question – and make sure the senior leaders listen and engage
- Don't take your middle-aged workers for granted – make sure you understand their aspirations and frustrations

Face up to the realities of blurred boundaries Social media has changed everything. People no longer have work identities that somehow stop at the door – social media demands a blurring of work and home time. The implication is that staff will talk much more about their work experiences – much as they do about their consumer experiences. Encourage everyone to act as brand ambassadors – ask only that they also act responsibly.

Get the benefit of that costly education Younger workers will start their working lives in huge debt. Organisations can help make sure they

have invested wisely by engaging with education providers about their needs as an employer. If they are small, they can get their trade body to do it. If bigger, they can leverage the advantage directly. It's important that we help students spend money on training and education that will benefit them to the full.

Tell the organisation's story Last, but not least, remember that people's energy at work is not a zero sum game. We can inspire people to give a lot more by continually selling the story of the organisation's mission and purpose, and their role in delivering this. Don't assume that we can do this purely with digital means: people like to come together. The important and enduring point is that it's the job of a leader to inspire not through gung ho charisma, but through a thoughtful and compelling argument about why the work of the business matters.

New future = new leaders

‘Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.’

(*Won't Get Fooled Again*, The Who, 1971)

Veteran rock guitarist Pete Townshend wrote this lyric more than 40 years ago when he was a 26-year-old baby boomer in pre-information age Great Britain. Now in his 60s, how could he have known that his words would be prophetic and just as relevant today, as we near the halfway mark of the second decade of the 21st century?

His lyrical simplicity begs deep, reflective questions about the nature of leadership in our post-industrial, post-9/11, post-banking crisis, digital-age world. Consider the following:

- What type of leader will serve us best today and in the near future?
- Conversely, what type of leader won't serve us?
- And how are these types of leader any different from those of the past?

Here are some clues to the type of effective business leader we can expect to see in the years leading up to 2023 and we briefly consider some of the issues they will need to anticipate and address to be effective.

The political context: A general election is scheduled 7 May, 2015. Will the Coalition, a new variant or a single party be elected and form the next government? And what will the new government's attitude

be towards business? What legislative programme will they unveil and what will this mean for those in leadership positions in business?

The economic context Will we finally emerge from the strait-jacket of recession into a sustained period of economic growth? How will business leaders position their organisations to take advantage commercially? And if recession continues, how will they adapt to an ongoing economic and trading malaise? What will they do to foster a culture of innovation in their organisations and manage risk at the same time?

The social context The Millennials – those born in the digital age, also known as the iGeneration, Internet Generation or Generation C – will be entering the workplace. At the same time, the population will continue to age and the pensionable age will have risen. More women will be in leadership positions creating greater sexual equality in the workplace. There will be an increase in ethnic diversity and a requirement to provide for the needs of the disabled. How will leaders address the differing life and work values and skill sets of a divergent workforce and galvanise it to work together and perform? How will they encourage discretionary effort – going the extra mile – when the wants, needs and skills of this divergent workforce will be even more marked than now?

The technological context Cloud computing, the inevitable growth in use of mobile devices with faster connectivity, greater use of social media and the increased ability to work remotely or at home, as well as being on call 24/7 will mean even greater flexibility in the workforce. How will leaders lead and their followers follow when they are both less visible as they become increasingly separated from a specific work location? How will business leaders

engage in a meaningful dialogue with a dispersed workforce and harness its productivity?

These are just some of the challenging contextual issues business leaders will need to anticipate and must address in the years leading up to 2023 and beyond. So what will it mean for them if they are to be effective?

More than 25 years of research by influential leadership experts Jim Kouzes & Barry Posner – which includes surveying thousands of people around the globe regularly during that period – has led to the development of their ‘Characteristics of Admired Leaders Checklist’. For more on this subject, see their definitive book on Leadership: *The Leadership Challenge*.

Although the world has changed greatly since 1987, the results of the Kouzes & Posner survey are surprisingly consistent. So much so, that the top four characteristics that followers look for in leaders they would willingly follow have not changed at all in that time. In fact their importance has grown and that trend is likely to continue. Perhaps that’s the real surprise and yet perhaps it’s no surprise at all – what followers look for in their leaders is timeless, regardless of the context. So, during the next few years, to be effective, leaders will need to consistently demonstrate the following characteristics:

Honest This goes beyond moral concepts about honesty. How leaders behave will be key to their effectiveness. Those in leadership positions in business will need to be seen to consistently do what they say they will do, when they say they will do it. They will need to ‘consistently walk the talk’ – to communicate appropriately to

demonstrate their authenticity and believability, if they are to connect with their workforce, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, values, skills and location. Effective leaders will need to honour commitments and promises at all times, such as returning phone calls and emails when they say they will or showing up at the appointed time for face-to-face meetings or when on Skype, as well as staging large-scale presentations. It will still be important for leaders to continually show their integrity and demonstrate visibly that their word is their bond.

Forward looking In a turbulent and discontinuous business world, leaders will need to be clear about the future and the direction of their organisation or their function within it to continue to attract and retain loyal, committed, productive staff. More than that, effective leaders will need to be able to articulate that future by painting a credible and compelling vision that connects with their people at an emotional level, as well as conceive and orchestrate the execution of a viable yet flexible plan to achieve it.

Increasingly too in the business world, individuals will seek meaning in their work that goes beyond the transaction of their time for money. Their organisation's purpose and that of their leaders must serve society at large. For instance: helping others achieve better lives or conserving the planet's resources. Effective leaders will need to ensure their vision and plan has an altruistic as opposed to self-serving dimension; that their organisation exists beyond the pursuit of financial performance and shareholder return if they are to connect with and leverage their staff to achieve the vision.

Inspiring The most effective leaders will need to inspire their workforce to commit to the future through their energy and enthusiasm. They will need to connect positively and engage at an emotional level with them. This will certainly be the case if resources or finances are limited or stretched. Those leaders that can inspire their people and in turn deepen levels of engagement with them will be able to unleash greater discretionary effort so that they go beyond what is contractually expected through the transaction of their time for money.

Competent Effective leaders will need to have a demonstrable track record of achievement under their belt. 'Soft skills' or emotional intelligence also known as EQ will become just as important as their technical skills or IQ over the next few years. While leaders may not need to be technically competent in every function, they will need to show an understanding and appreciation of all aspects of their organisation and value the work their people do. More than ever, they will need to be agile, to move seamlessly at all times – from one technical function to the next, from big picture to minute detail, from hard to soft skills, from written to verbal communication, from one-to-one engagement to large-scale presentations, from younger to older team members.

So as we approach 2023 there is plenty of scope for success and failure for leaders. And maybe Pete Townshend was right after all, that the new boss is the same as the old boss, particularly when the most admired leadership characteristics have proved timeless. But perhaps the one distinction that separates the old leader from the new is agility. The emergence of the 'agile generalist' may yet prove to be the most effective leader of all. Only time will tell.

The innovation nation

In BergHind Joseph's 2011 and 2012 Global Players study the websites of the top 100 companies in the Fortune Global 500 were visited. The aim was to identify and discuss new and interesting developments in the world of online communication.

The findings were captivating. Over two years four core ideas were uncovered, which were deemed essential to the world of business communication:

1. **Leading with ideas and innovation** – organisations were presenting themselves as problem solvers for some of the world's biggest social challenges.
2. **Creating social value** – companies were pursuing the ideals of social and environmental sustainability, viewing them as a business opportunity to integrate into their overall strategies.
3. **Opening dialogues** – businesses were creating engaging online presences using multiple communication platforms, to open dialogues with and among their stakeholders.
4. **Corporate storytelling** – organisations were using debate and dialogue, social value and innovation to build corporate narratives that clarified their brands and improved stakeholders' perceptions of them.

A changing paradigm

While those organisations featured in 2011 and 2012 Global Players are among the most successful, the business model that led them to their success is changing. Brands can no longer rely on winning business from their status or mark alone, and long gone is the business model that focused purely on capital, labour and raw materials.

Success is now defined by how well a business understands its customers, both en masse and individually. A business must also understand and adapt to its local market; a notion that has been dubbed 'hyper-personalisation'.

These changes in focus mean that today's smaller, agile businesses are threatening the success of the corporate giants. Featuring large, hierarchical structures, many of the world's biggest organisations are finding their operational methods cumbersome and restrictive of innovation.

Smaller businesses are often far more successful at innovating. Unencumbered by complex structures and protocols they are closer to their customers, giving such organisations a greater understanding of the people they are trying to serve while their lightweight infrastructures enable them to respond fast to consumer demands.

Innovation – it's not all about future-gazing

When innovation is targeted and appropriate, it becomes one of the most important components in a business's success.

Innovation does not require huge expenditure on research and development (R&D) or the creation of new products that will be used for many years to come. This type of innovation has its place, but most of the innovation referred to in 2013 Global Players relates to ways of operating a business, caring for employees and talking with customers.

2013 Global Players identified four key themes that can be seen in some of the world's most innovative businesses:

1. **Innovation can be small** – while 2011 Global Players found that businesses were aspiring to find big solutions to social challenges, this year's study discovers innovation can be small but still have impact. 2013 Global Players finds that organisations with network-like, flatter structures are able to rapidly assess and adapt to markets, political environments and even to individual consumers.

2. **Customer-centricity** – as Amazon puts it, 'leaders start with the customer and work backwards. They work vigorously to earn and keep customer trust'. Listening skills, market sensitivity and rapid reflexes are building today's most successful businesses.

3. **Everyone innovates** – traditionally the innovation model was the preserve of specialised departments within a business, such as the R&D team. Today, top organisations are turning this model on its head by creating a company-wide innovation culture in which employees are encouraged to question established ways of doing things.

4. **Supporting staff** – creating a working environment that is motivational, respectful, diverse, inclusive and offers staff their autonomy fosters innovation and results in an improved experience for the customer.

Will more companies adopt a different business model that incorporates these ideas? Will they adapt to a fast-changing way of working? It may well be the way businesses operate in 2023.

Death of a salesman?

By 2023 the traditional 'sales rep', as we still know them today, will no longer exist.

All the information that we require will be available digitally and will be accessible everywhere. Customers will no longer feel that they require any sort of sales presentation whatsoever, in order to make informed decisions. Rather, customers will diagnose their problems and define the solutions without any human interaction with possible suppliers. Automation and procurement departments will then ensure the best price and terms are obtained.

Meetings, either face to face or via video conference, may be required to reassure a customer that they can work with a particular supplier. However, these will be merely box-ticking exercises allowing little opportunity for a traditional sales person to 'add value'. Moreover, these meetings may be better suited to the talents of a customer relationship manager, who can foster good relationships with a customer, rather than a traditional salesperson with their abilities to 'handle objections' and 'close deals'.

This, of course, does not mean that in 2023 companies will no longer 'sell'. Nor does it imply that there will be no personnel responsible for 'creating opportunities' and obtaining 'deals'.

However, successful companies in 2023 will not be using the model utilised by most businesses today.

Information will increasingly be disseminated through conversation rather than publication. Peer-to-peer platforms will be the environments that are used more and more to obtain information as the trust in traditional organisations, such as governments, religious institutions, banks and businesses break down. It will be within these 'created communities' that sales leads, credibility and trust will be secured.

The implication of this is that the traditional 'hunters' of the sales world will no longer be needed. These are the people who metaphorically 'bashed down doors' by visiting industrial estates and office blocks, and went door to door, or made cold telephone calls, probably the main lead generation activity of most salespeople.

Instead, leads will be gathered by using listening tools and monitoring social platforms and communities. Companies will be looking for triggers that can be the start of a worthwhile conversation. In order to be able to have these conversations, those engaged in sales, in the future, will have to be leading experts in their field. They will require a real grasp of the wider implications and business imperatives of the challenges faced.

Moreover, the work will not just take place when a conversation begins. Those engaged in sales activities will have to demonstrate their value and credibility beforehand. This means that they will have to be writing blogs and articles, posting on social platforms and contributing in forums. 'Becoming an influencer' in their particular specialism will become a more important aspect of the

role that is required from a business development specialist. Of course, this is a complete change from the skills that most 'salespeople' currently require, or are trained in, by those who employ them. Moreover, some of the work highlighted will crossover with the activities of the marketing team.

Perhaps this brings another big evolution to the forefront, that by 2023, the idea of having separate sales and marketing departments will be an anachronism from yesteryear. These two departments will have to merge into one, entitled something like 'Customer Communications'. Within this department there will be those who are the public face of a business and those who will take more of a back-room role, but everyone will have to work closely together.

In fact, as customer service, and even delivery taking place online and on platforms accessible to all, every person within an organisation, will have to be trained and well versed in customer communications. Businesses will find that some of the key influencers in customers making purchasing decisions are not officially in their sales or marketing teams at all.

As customers, themselves, take the lead in purchasing decisions rather than relying on a few sales presentations from possible suppliers, the techniques and approach that those involved in selling will need to develop will be very different from the skill sets that most people think are important in 2013.

Salespeople have traditionally focused on speaking to customers at their time of 'need'. The process has then been to understand their challenges, provide solutions, explain the virtues of their offering over others and 'close' the business. Customers will use the

information they obtain online to diagnose their issues and find relevant solutions. The result will be that salespeople will no longer be able to 'add value' during this part of the process.

The opportunity, in the future, for salespeople to add value to potential customers is when their buying journey is about to start. Instead of knocking on customer doors, the requirement will be for salespeople to ensure they are 'hanging out' in the places where customers start to look for answers.

Instead of touting solutions, salespeople will only provide value and gain credibility with a customer if they are able to deliver 'insights'. That is, have the ability through video and the written word to be able to challenge a customer's thinking and provide them with real 'food for thought'. In this way, a salesperson will be giving real value, gaining credibility and actually helping their customer define their buying criteria. This will also help the sales process as there is likely to be a much better fit between customer and supplier, further down the line.

In short, by 2023, sales will not be a department, but a way of working. Companies will have to change the structure of their communications, and their perception of how they create value, in order to accommodate this change. Meanwhile, salespeople themselves will need a different set of skills in order to accomplish the new set of tasks they will find themselves undertaking.

We are moving towards a brave new world. As in so many other aspects of business, sales will see a radical change in order to meet the new paradigms that are starting to emerge.

In search of sustainability

Four years on from the collapse of Lehman Brothers there still seems no end in sight to austerity as even the most robust economies put in decidedly lacklustre performances. Many now speak of a 'lost decade' and that is very bad news for the unemployed and the working poor. There seems little doubt in the public's mind as to who is to blame. First and foremost the banks but there is also concern among UK industrialists that business more generally has caught a cold thanks to this. Do they want to look back in 2023 at another 'lost decade'?

It's pretty clear that the public now wants something different. In his recent book *Who Cares Wins*, David Jones reports that 80% of consumers believe it's important that companies stand for more than profitability, while an extraordinary 74% believe they have as much responsibility to drive social change as government. Among the young the idea of business as a driving force for positive social change is yet more marked.

All very well but doesn't this put business in something of a bind? It's great to be idealistic but surely what matters most is that we have a thriving, profitable business sector? If we're looking for ways in which to square this particular circle it pays to go back to the future. The model of capitalism that has brought us to our present state of affairs – the so-called 'shareholder value' model in which

financial returns are the only measure of business success – is only a relatively recent phenomenon, hailing as it does from the late '70s and 'stagflation'. Prior to that a much more benign model was prevalent. One of the best examples of this – and it's ironic given our present predicament – was the investment bank S G Warburg, which grew to be one of the titans of the post-war City of London.

In his biography of Siegmund Warburg, *High Financier: The Lives and Time of Siegmund Warburg*, Niall Ferguson paints a picture of a man that focused on the customer relationship above everything else. In this sense, S G Warburg puts its reputation, longevity and sustainability above all else. Ferguson says that when researching his book he rarely found evidence of Warburg talking about or in any way prioritising profit. When he did refer to profit it was typically like this:

'Success from the financial and from the prestige point of view, important and self-understood as it is, is not enough. What matters even more is constructive achievement and adherence to high moral and aesthetic standards in the way in which we do our work.'

('The People's Banker', Niall Ferguson, *Financial Times*, 26 June, 2010)

What mattered to Warburg above all else was doing great work for his clients and he pursued that goal in the clear belief that everything else would follow. Fast forward to the present day and we find a few, shining examples of well-run companies that act similarly. Apple in the US and John Lewis in the UK come readily to mind. But what about the clear desire on the part of consumers for business to play a big role in driving positive social change?

This is where the sustainability of the company and the pursuit of positive social goals – including environmental sustainability

– come together. The reason for this is quite simple – consumers now have a strength of voice they have never had and the evidence suggests they are prepared to use it. In Apple's case just look at how it has been forced onto the back foot over the pay and treatment of those who make its kit in the Far East. And if you look at any number of recent corporate reputational disasters you will see the growing influence of social media. In *Who Cares Wins* David Jones provides many telling, and often amusing examples, the most startling is the BP oil spill of 2010. So incensed was one American tweeter, Leroy Stick, that he created a Twitter account called BPGlobalPR that satirised BP's inept handling of the situation. His popularity was such that he had 190,000 followers compared to the official BP site's 18,000. It was his jokes that were reported and contributed to the halving of the BP share price in just two weeks.

For too long corporate CSR statements have been at best worthy statements of marginal activities, at worst cynical add-ons. Smart companies will realise that if they follow Warburg's example and put their customers first, everything else will fall into place. This may take them into unfamiliar territory where they have to be mindful of their ethical and environmental footprint but they can be sure that consumers will reward them if they do – and punish them if they don't.

The future – getting people on board

We will inevitably reach 2023. But how do you take the ideas and predictions outlined in this book and begin to plan for its arrival? More importantly how do you get others in your organisation to take note of these forecasts, engage with the idea of the future and plan for it too? After all you can't future proof an organisation alone. It will have to be a group effort.

Much of the solution lies with employee engagement – to obtain an optimum level of employee commitment towards the business, a belief in its direction, an understanding of how it will reach its goals and the desire to play an active part in helping it get there.

When this level of engagement exists, employees will actively want to devise strategies, plans and mechanisms that will secure the business now and in the future. The question just remains of how to get that engagement?

- Begin a real dialogue with staff – a genuine two-way conversation. This means not only listening to what employees have to say, but also acting on it.
- Create a communication strategy that explains your company's vision, values and business objectives. It's

important that your people understand how their own work fits into the bigger picture, and how they can help to achieve the company's goals.

- Make it face to face as much as possible, and involve your line managers. Employees like to find out about issues that affect them from their own managers.
- Create a narrative about where the business is going, what it has to achieve, how employees will benefit, and how they can contribute. Illustrate it with personal stories of achievement gathered from within the business. Stories are more memorable and persuasive than flow diagrams and lists of bullet points in PowerPoint.
- Be consistent. Don't tell one audience one thing and another something else, as – especially in the internet age – they're bound to compare notes and spot the contradictions.
- Be honest. Tell people the bad news as well as the good news and when you can't give the full picture, tell them why, making it clear when more information will be available.
- However you communicate, make it interesting and focused. If you bombard people with emails they'll switch off. Find out how they'd like to be communicated with. It's good to have an engaging and content-rich intranet, but it's only useful if your staff actually have access to it. Think how best to reach people who work in warehouses, on shop floors or who spend most of their time away from a computer – you'll need to think of different ways of reaching them.
- Keep it simple and avoid overloading people with lots of different messages. Even with more sophisticated

audiences, it's best to stick to a few, really key points that you want them to remember. And avoid management jargon at all costs! Eyes will glaze over the instant you begin to talk about 'leveraging core competencies'.

- Measure and evaluate. Don't assume that just because you're talking to your staff, they are actually listening. You need feedback to tell you whether what you're doing is effective or if you need to change your approach.

On initiating these mechanisms and through their effective deployment employee engagement within the business is far more attainable. From this point you will be well positioned to focus and talk about the future, and begin to respond to some of the ideas outlined in this book.

Channelling this focus will come from developing a communication strategy that concentrates on the future and creates an environment that encourages people to think and work towards it. Ultimately creating an agile, forward-thinking business.

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Mark is a consultant and coach. His expertise lies in value-focused leadership. He has worked with chairmen, CEOs and senior executives in companies as diverse as the National Portrait Gallery, the BBC, Swisscom, Vitec, and Deutsche Morgan Grenfell. His 34-year career has spanned broadcast journalism, management consultancy and, most recently, a key strategy role advising the BBC's Chairman and Trustees. Mark knows first-hand what it's like to work under pressure at the top of organisations and in the glare of public scrutiny.

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We are a London-based design and communication agency. We operate around the world and work with businesses to solve their communication challenges.

We develop employee engagement, branding and business communication solutions that gain attention, create impact and transform the way people understand and want to work with your business; ultimately helping you on your quest to drive performance and deliver results.

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