

Purpose Led Repurposing

- Matt Bennion and Alisdair Gillies



GREENGATE
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Dare we imagine the office of the future as a place that brings purposeful performance to life and inspires social connectivity, innovation and creativity, the cultural and community centre of the business?

Technological disruption, changing generational expectations, shifting markets and rising costs are forcing organisations to seek new ways of doing business in a quest to secure highly motivated people to build truly long-term value and deliver enduring growth.

To remain relevant, many larger businesses have begun a journey of becoming 'purpose led' in the belief that the agility, innovation and engagement that comes from a longer term focus on a higher cause, "the why", will deliver sustainable performance over the long term and the evidence supports these moves. Surveys suggest that employees who feel they are working towards a meaningful cause are up to 30% more productive and in a recent study of 50,000 global brands, the top 50 financially performing brands pursued purpose ahead of profit, creating increased shared value for all stakeholders. It is a compelling business case.

Embracing a purpose led approach requires a fundamental mindset shift from the board room to the shop floor with short term and introspective EBITA, net revenue and sales targets being replaced by a long-term quest to meet an

organisations cause by fulfilling a higher purpose or customer need that transcends the organisation itself.

The focus on customer and purpose can bring about an inspiring culture of innovation and adaptability enabled through collaboration, co-creation and dissemination of authority to the originators of shared value. It is after all culture that makes business sustainable

Whilst COVID-19 has caused untold tragedy across the globe, one of the positives has been that more organisations have had no choice but to empower their employees to work independently and this will now become the norm rather than the exception.

Beyond empowerment, purpose led businesses establish a values based moral contract with their customers, people and stakeholders who place their belief and trust in the organisation and 'buy in' to the cause at an emotional level. Maintaining that trust requires authentic and consistent leadership of the cause across every aspect of the business including leadership, strategy, operational tactics, process, systems, people and physical environments like offices.

Forward looking organisations have long understood the value in providing a more visible signal of their purpose in their offices, most notably with measures to improve collaboration, sustainability and wellbeing. The advent of COVID-19 and the overnight transition to home working have therefore had a very significant and potentially long term implication on the design and operation of workplaces as the focus switches to infection control and the

segregation of people and business activities.

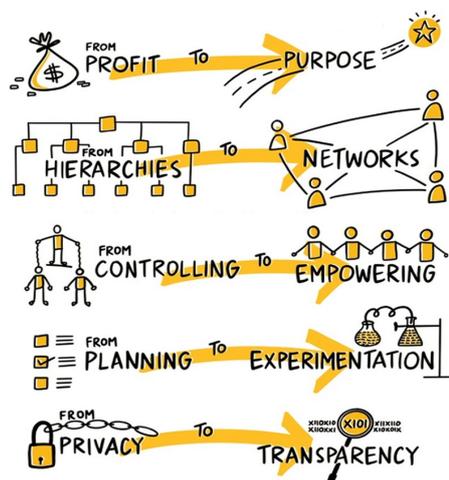
Some have signalled "the end of the office" as a result of the current pandemic, with many businesses seeking to make home working permanent and take advantage of huge savings in their fixed overheads.

The desire to reduce costs is understood; for most businesses property is the second biggest cost line behind people, but the sudden move to a virtual workplace presents many psychological challenges for people which will likely have a much longer lasting impact on business performance.

Businesses that focus on short term cost reduction perhaps underestimate the social role that the office plays for people and the impact that it has on customer and people engagement, happiness, productivity and performance. Whilst COVID-19 has had an enormous and disruptive impact on the workplace and financial performance and the temptation will be to play it short, we believe the current crisis is an opportunity to tap into the societal shift towards more purposeful living and working and emerge from the crisis stronger and more sustainable by re-imagining and adapting their business models and their workplaces.

Dare we imagine the office of the future as a place that brings purposeful performance to life and inspires social connectivity, innovation and creativity, the cultural and community centre of the business? It's a huge change from the status quo where offices are used to shelter and control workers and work, but with the shift to more home working, it is easy to imagine the world where work is done at home and offices become innovation and inspiration hubs, dedicated to providing the ultimate in customer and people engagement, experience and wellbeing.

For those businesses with the courage, vision and financial capacity to focus on the long term the economic case for this approach is as strong if not greater than the temptation to simply reduce the costs of fixed office space. The nature of the office will undoubtedly change and may well reduce in size, but in our view its importance for people and performance will grow.



Graphic Illustration: Tammy Vora

Matt Bennion



Matt is co-founder of The Cause Effect a consultancy that helps organisations and teams to achieve purposeful performance.

Matt has over 30 years' experience of delivering built asset consultancy in the property and infrastructure sectors and for blue-chip investors. Prior to The Cause Effect, Matt was the Chief Executive Officer for Arcadis Asia where he transformed 5 firms into one integrated Arcadis with its own distinct culture. In his role Matt developed and launched Arcadis' Resilient Cities and digital transformation programmes.

Matt's interest in the workplace of the future and the importance of culture comes from his experience in advising private and public sector clients on major commercial and urban developments and infrastructure programmes in the UK, the Middle East and Asia and from his personal leadership of numerous consultancy assignments and transformational change programmes.

Alisdair Gillies



Alisdair Gillies is Managing Director of Greengate Advisors; a real estate consultancy founded to create a positive impact for clients, employees and the community.

Having worked across Asia, Europe and the USA, Alisdair has witnessed first-hand the power that purpose driven organisations have on their employees and customers. Alisdair believes purpose transcends businesses and superior returns can be generated for commercial real estate when planning, design, execution and management are all underpinned by a common purpose.

Alisdair's interest in purpose driven assets and organisations stems from advising public and private sector organisations on the importance of strategic planning and dynamic asset management in creating enduring businesses in addition to his technical advisory work on performing and non-performing assets.