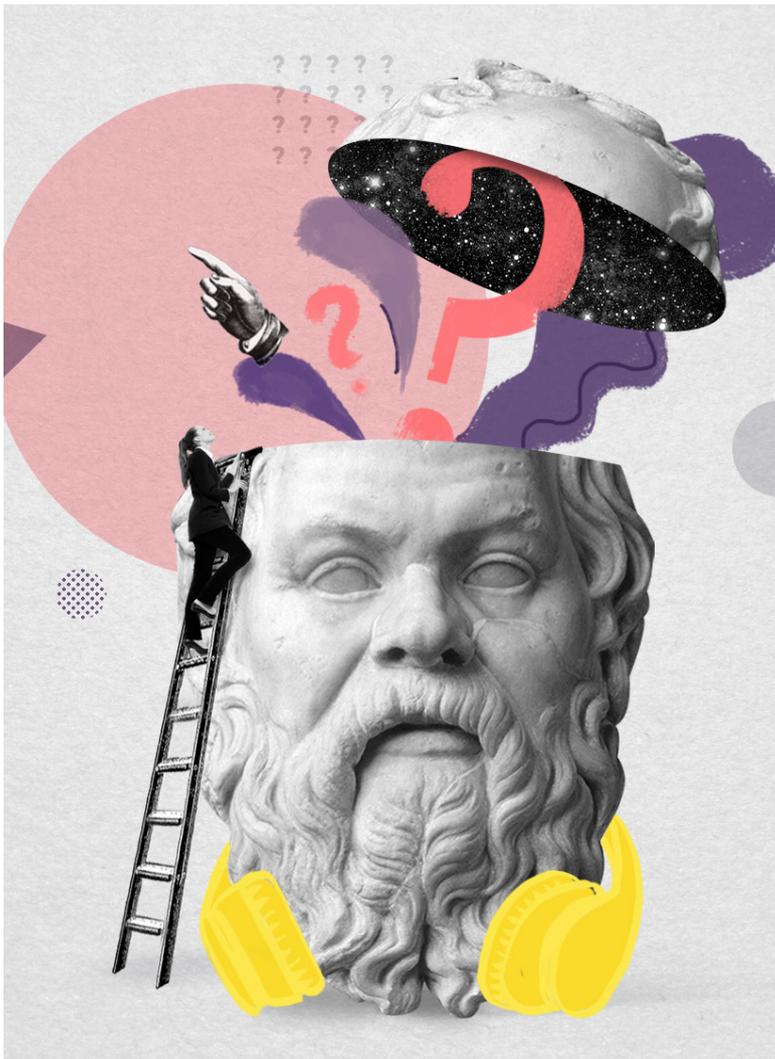


Shaping The Future: The Imperative To Evolve Your Business Philosophy

Nine provocations for business leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs





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Nine provocations for business leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs

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Introduction

I have wanted to write something on how philosophy will play a greater role in contemporary business for several years. Of course, it's an area that has been covered before ([Forbes wrote about the Chief Philosopher in 2018](#), and some companies already have in-house philosophers, or at least consult with philosophers, as reported by [Wired in 2019](#)) but both the idea and need feel more relevant now than ever.

To solve the challenges of our time, to innovate and create a bright, sustainable future we need to start making decisions on a different basis. Doing this requires new philosophies which power the choices we make. Companies need new thinking to that of standard digital transformation fare. This was true before the COVID-19 pandemic and will be true long after.

The term business philosophy is open to interpretation and hard to define. For me, it is akin to saying something like "your philosophy on parenting". It encapsulates many things, including your values and approach. But fundamentally it is the basis on which you make decisions. To help underline the point that philosophy in business must be practical and applicable, I have included nine practical provocations for business leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs to begin challenging their decision-making and choices, which ultimately is what this essay is all about.

What follows is not an article but a ten-paged essay that will take about 40 minutes to read. I acknowledge this is asking for a great deal of your attention, but hopefully it will prove to be worthwhile.

Here is an abstract to help you decide if you want to spend the next 40 minutes with me. I am grateful for the help of Julian Hirst, Margie Goldsmith, Ben Sales and Margot Noel. Their smart inputs and edits were instrumental.

Abstract

Rising complexity means the number and nature of competences that businesses and brands need to succeed is expanding. Traditional functions like operations, sales, marketing, and IT evolve and are joined by new competencies like design and data. The next frontier of organisational excellence is philosophy. Why?

- Technological progress increasingly means answering complex philosophical questions.
- While there is much to be optimistic about, humans, animals, and the planet face numerous challenges from climate change to inequality. There is an absence of a coherent mainstream vision for a sustainable future and practical solutions on how to get there.
- Radical change cannot be left to government policy and legislation alone. We need new business models with environmental and social considerations baked in.
- People's attitudes towards value creation will shift as more and more value is captured by machines instead of human beings. The wider intention of a business will matter more and more, with profound implications for companies and brands.

Philosophical capabilities are a crucial component for meeting these complex challenges and realising opportunities. Doing so requires resolving tensions, balancing paradoxes, and building consensus.

To do this effectively, organisations will need to make decisions on a different basis. That means changing what you believe in, and what you value, i.e. your philosophy.

Philosophy in business encompasses more than ethics and morals. Your philosophy is the basis on which decisions are made at every level in your organisation, by people, and by automated systems.

Abstract

Here are nine things business leaders can do now to build and apply philosophical capabilities:

- ▶ Articulate your business philosophy.
- ▶ Re-examine your decision-making frameworks.
- ▶ Focus on creating meaning, not just talking about purpose.
- ▶ Explore whether you can redraw your company's sphere of positive influence.
- ▶ Look for inspiration and counsel beyond your own borders.
- ▶ Broaden the optics through which you look at partnerships – beyond pure commercials – to include mission and purpose-based ones.
- ▶ Explore the implications of automated decision-making (algorithms).
- ▶ Be radical – hire people who can boost your philosophical capabilities. Perhaps even a Chief Philosopher.
- ▶ Create the supporting culture that enables philosophical capabilities to flourish.

Shaping The Future: The Imperative To Evolve Your Business Philosophy

Seven provocations for business leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs

The new competence for successful business

One of the most powerful forces that shapes contemporary business is ‘rising complexity’. As business itself becomes ever more complex, existing ‘core’ competencies — such as Sales, Marketing, Finance, Logistics, HR, Legal and IT — evolve, and are joined by an increasing number of new ones — like Design and Data — which become part of the literacy of mainstream business.

Look no further than the revolutions we’ve seen in marketing (driven by social) or in IT (driven by cloud and machine-learning) for how traditional functions have evolved. More than new technologies, these revolutions involve completely different ways of working such as Agile and DevOps. Everything is influenced by rising complexity.

New business competencies demand new forms of mastery. One of the key questions for CEOs and leadership teams today is: what competencies do we need to master in-house, and where should we partner in order to succeed? New competencies lead to the formation of new structures and operations within organisations, from new boardroom positions to new business units. The resulting fundamental changes to the way things get done mean, new processes, new culture, new decision-making. The

latter is often overlooked and probably the hardest aspect to get right, which leads me to the topic of this article.

The patterns created by ‘rising complexity’ go back decades. In the 80s, as organisations relied more and more on technology to unlock their potential, we saw the rise of the CTO/CIO. The 90s were dominated by the CMO, as the role of brand and marketing expanded to fill new digital spaces. The 00s saw the emergence of the Chief Design Officer, as competition and customers demanded intuitive products and experiences. Other C-Level positions and new functions appeared as data became the new gold; Chief Data Scientists to make sense of the tsunami of information, and Chief of Cyber Security to protect it. As businesses grew to appreciate that digital is more than just another channel, the Chief Digital Officer became commonplace.

So what is the next frontier of business competence? Philosophy. Companies in all their forms — especially powerful ones — have needed greater philosophical capabilities for some time, but the need is now more widespread and urgent. Without it, opportunities will be lost and the future we will create will be, simply put, inferior. Such shifts require philosophical

competence and capabilities to catalyse new thinking and provide the direction and the confidence to do things differently.

The need for more philosophical competency in business can be framed around the clickable idea of a Chief Philosopher. However, these competencies are too important to be confined to the boardroom. Like other new competencies such as design, they need to be distributed across an organisation. Moreover, when it comes to decision-making, your philosophy needs to be codified into your algorithms, and not just understood by your employees and partners. Will philosophical leadership be required? Yes. Might such a person be called a Chief Philosopher? Sure. But equally, such responsibility may fall to the CEO. Either way, without strong philosophical leadership and buy-in across the organisation, business advantage will be weakened and opportunities lost.

More than ethics and morals

Typically the argument for more philosophy in business is ethics and morals. The world faces many difficult challenges, and technology-enabled progress increasingly comes with the responsibility to consider complex philosophical questions. From my perspective though, the need for philosophical capability is something more elemental than ethics and morals. They are components of course, but your philosophy underpins the fundamental basis on which decisions are made within an organisation, at every level, by people and algorithms.

Some people will say this is the same as your purpose. I disagree. For the simple reason that fulfilling your purpose will become increasingly difficult to do whilst ignoring or avoiding related consequences. And this is

assuming your purpose is well drafted, genuinely felt, and acted upon. Difficult decisions don't always have to involve morals or ethics. A decision may hinge on a confidence level in achieving a particular outcome or the consequences of something not working. Then this becomes about your philosophy on risk.

People may also ask how business philosophy differs from business values? There is overlap for sure. From my perspective, business philosophy is more expansive though. Your company values may not cover matters such as how much you invest innovation for example. Or how much profit to return to shareholders. Where as your business philosophy would.

In financial services, artificial intelligence and machine learning could transform the way we manage our money, yet most incumbent banks are philosophically against the idea of giving advice. So the full potential of the technology is not utilised. Taking that one step further, what role does personal responsibility play as we 'outsource' more and more of our lives? What will it mean for financial literacy? And will it matter? Is Responsibility the new 'Privacy'? These are nuanced philosophical questions.

The basis of company decisions

As business has become more digital, we have witnessed an explosion of data, analytical tools, and services to aid decision-making. These innovations can aid pretty much every aspect of business, from strategy to sales and beyond — supporting automated or human-based decisions, be they small or big, real-time or long term ones. But when it comes to delivering change, charting a new path, and doing things differently, it is the basis on which decisions are made that needs to evolve.

Debates on whether or not we need to make different choices to combat challenges such as climate change, or to think about the implications of technology, are mute. The debates that matter are concerned with what we are actually going to do. In this context, you can be surrounded by new information sources and tools, but if the fundamental basis on which you take decisions doesn't change; different outcomes are unlikely to materialise, especially when they are difficult, challenge a well worn business model, or disrupt the status quo.

Changing the basis on which decisions are made means changing what you believe in, what you value, and what impact you want to create.

The other danger of COVID-19

Looking around the globe before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was much to admire, but humans, animals, and the planet already faced serious challenges such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, inequality in many forms, racism, violence and war. Solving these challenges to create a sustainable future was already an imperative before the pandemic, and it will continue to be long after.

At the time of writing, we do not know how COVID-19 will play out over time. Times of crisis, like this one, certainly test our beliefs and decision making, whether you are a government wrestling with the dilemma of balancing lives with livelihoods or a company trying to survive, adapt or capitalise on opportunity. But to frame COVID-19 as the crisis that forces us to make different decisions, would be to underplay and trivialise the very serious challenges that we were already facing.

The pandemic has had a tremendous accelerating

effect on some existing trends and technologies, for example the rapid arrival of telemedicine or the mass adoption of video calling. It has also accelerated the need for greater philosophical capabilities. Perhaps, this will be amongst this pandemic's positive legacies.

As companies, governments, brands, and citizens start to think about what the future could be, and what will be different post COVID-19, we have a massive opportunity to reconsider the basis on which decisions are made and the philosophies that shape them. We are very likely heading into a global recession — even a depression — which means many companies will inevitably have to make tough decisions in order to survive. When thinking for the long term though, we need to differentiate how companies and organisations react to a crisis, from what their normal state intentionality or strategies are.

The real risk here is that, rather than COVID-19 being a watershed moment, in the drive to revive the world's economies things return, over time, to the way they were before. The emergency alarm for greater philosophical capabilities is sounding loud and clear. Bring on the philosophers.

Where can philosophical capabilities make a difference in business?

Four areas particularly stand out.

First, we need new visions. When it comes down to practical realities of transitioning to something different, sustainable, and fairer, there is currently an absence of a mainstream, viable vision that ticks

all the boxes. Governments can and must legislate to drive change on things like carbon emissions, the use of plastic and so forth. Companies, for their part, must be brave, collaborate and take decisions on a different basis if they are to meet targets, adopt new approaches and deliver lasting, sustainable change. This means new visions forged from new philosophies to power a new era of decision-making.

Second, we need new types of business model innovation. Digital disruption and other forces created a wave of business model innovation over the last 20 years. But how many of these new business models are formulated around the considerations and pressures of our time? As time goes on, these pressures will surely be harder to ignore. The world needs something more than digital-driven business model innovation. It needs models where environmental, social, and other considerations are baked into the core of the designs, not simply left to government policy and legislation.

Third, we need to be equipped to navigate the increasingly complex issues that come with technological innovation and progress. The rise of technology has always created philosophical tensions. With the acceleration of digital technology in the 21st century, organisations increasingly find themselves having to resolve philosophical questions before they can unlock the power of innovation; or even remain socially relevant. Look no further than Facebook for an example of how answers to philosophical questions rather than technical ones affect what services a company provides and its direction of travel. Privacy, trust, digital addiction, anxiety, bullying, and free speech are just some of the areas and issues where Facebook's philosophy and decision-making will directly affect their products and not only define the company's future, but also its legacy. These issues are not conceptual, fluffy, or abstract. They are real, spiky, sharp, and can pop your

balloon if mishandled. Grappling them is necessary for technological progress. And we are just getting started. Incredibly exciting nascent technologies such as genetic medicine are well advanced, bringing with them questions that make those arising from social media look trivial.

Fourth, we need new approaches as attitudes towards value creation change. Today, as consumers, we are often - wittingly and unwittingly - abstracted from the real world impact and consequences of our buying choices, and how value is created. There is an Abstraction Gap. Illusionary phrases such as "the cloud" mask the physical reality of data centres and servers that consume vast amounts of energy. We do not experience the environmental impacts of buying fast fashion in a way that builds a link between the two. When we enjoy fast food, the sound of chainsaws and deforestation are inaudible. The mechanisms of economies of scale and globalisation are out of sight. In the future when I can choose from an autonomous Uber at £x a mile, or one driven by a human which is £x+Y a mile, I will have a choice: act in my own interests and select an autonomous vehicle which will be cheaper; or choose one driven by a human, and in doing so, support someone who is trying to pay their bills and raise their family. History tells us that people will act in their own interests. But perhaps for the first time, we are on a path where people's consumption choices will be made on a different basis.

As automation spreads, and more and more value is captured by fewer people and, crucially, more and more by machines – the abstraction gap will close as people come to understand that their own employment or company success relies on people choosing to buy from them. We will then see, perhaps for the first time in history, people making buying decisions based on having a much closer connection to the mutual and connected impact of

their consumption choices and behaviours. When this realisation starts to take hold, people's allegiances and values will change.

In his 2004 book Altered Carbon, the Science Fiction writer Richard Morgan depicts this sentiment, imagining cities full of empty hotels owned and run by lonely AI corporations. There are no bookings as people choose not to give AIs their custom. Sci-Fi fantasy or perhaps prescient? In the near term future, how will people feel about companies that actively choose not to employ people or contribute to society? I once had a conversation with the CTO of a very well-known UK retail banking fintech who told me he took it as a personal failure each time they had to hire a person. The problem with the singular pursuit of automation is that it creates imbalance. Imbalance, along with inequality, lies at the epicentre of the world's problems. There are billions of people. Value is captured by a tiny minority. Can that be sustainable? We humans are not naturally good at working through conflicting ideas or competing imperatives, and yet these are a necessary part of achieving balance.

Advances in artificial intelligence and robotics have propelled philosophical questions — like Universal Basic Income — into the mainstream, because in practice, Digital Transformation is often a proxy for saying “How can we do this without any people”. RPA stands for “Robot Processing Automation” but it also stands for “Real People Absent”. People are not blind to the potentially negative consequences of the widespread application of these technologies, but the upsides are economically compelling and unlock exciting brand new types of utility and opportunities that have not been possible before. Many of them build a positive future — digitally enabled healthcare for example — and form the basis of the next era of companies, services, and products. We must proceed,

and we will proceed, but can we afford to ignore the consequences?

It's not hard to imagine a “Morgan-esque” future, where brands with a genuine philosophy of employing humans in a fair way — where they might have used robots — proudly display a “Free Trade” equivalent kite mark boasting “we employ real people”. In this future, consumers will actively choose to shop or use products and services that create jobs and value humans alongside machines. There will be opportunities for those companies who can evolve their philosophies from the singular pursuit of automation, cost reduction, and maximising profit.

I'm not trying to build an argument that we shouldn't progress. We must. It is the essence of humanity. But if we take, in this instance, automation to its logical conclusion in more and more areas of life, what will be the result? As evolved monkeys playing with more and more sophisticated technologies such as gene sequencing and AI, we surely need both hands on the wheel with a very clear idea of where we are going. Call in the philosophers, now.

Philosophical capabilities will create traction

We know that the challenges the planet and societies face are massively complex. Their nature - and indeed human nature - means that any decision to change an aspect of everyday life we value will be met with resistance laced with vested interest and skepticism. Making genuine progress requires dealing with tensions, competing interests and paradoxes. For instance, how can the West and Europe balance the need for consumption to drive their economies, with the need to address the climate emergency? These

needs contradict each other in our current societal model. It is also clear that not everything can or should be left to “the market”.

Successfully navigating such complex tensions to deliver genuine change at global scale that builds a sustainable future, will require making decisions on a different basis. I would argue that more philosophical consideration and input will be essential in a world full of ‘wicked problems’. The need for greater philosophical capabilities is not just about dealing with challenges, it’s also about realising life-changing and positive opportunities arising from technological progress. A key question, as we create and deploy more and more powerful technologies such as AI and genetic medicine, is do we want blind progress? Progress at any cost? Or progress that is more mindful and considered?

Wherever we look, progressive, sustainable solutions will be all about achieving balance; they will not push extremist ideologies that increase inertia. Greater philosophical capabilities will help brush aside counterproductive idealism, which has no place in the real world, and will help support navigation towards something that can actually work. Philosophical capabilities will help nurture and facilitate difficult conversations. Philosophical capabilities will help forge the next era of decision-making, algorithmic as well as human.

Seven things business leaders can do now to build and apply philosophical capabilities

Having set the scene for why and how philosophical capabilities are the next competence for successful business, let’s move onto some practical suggestions that you can act on now.

1. Articulate your business philosophy

Do you have a well articulated business philosophy? Let’s start with the obvious. Your organisation will almost certainly have a documented purpose or mission along with a set of values. These will be disseminated across the organisation and ideally ‘lived’ by the people who work there. Firstly, do your documented values encapsulate what you would regard as the building blocks of your business philosophy that everyone in the organisation needs to understand and enact? Or perhaps, are your company values heavily tilted towards company culture and do not express other aspects that are important to the success of the business, its purpose and wider impact?

Secondly, are your values drafted in such a way that helps inform decision making? These are subtle but important points.

In other words, are the elements that frame your company’s why and how, expansive enough? Are you clear on what your business philosophy is? Are the board and colleagues across the organisation? The process of developing a documented business philosophy and its activation can give additional shape, energy and direction to company decision making.

2. Re-examine your decision-making frameworks

Given the challenges and opportunities ahead, are your decision-making frameworks fit for purpose? Does decision-making across your organisation need to be updated to support the evolution of your company in the context of the forces reshaping your sector, and the world more broadly? Or does decision-making need to be updated where innovation or progress comes attached with potential side effects?

In a conversation about a draft of this paper, Ben Sales, a Product Director, voiced the importance of time horizons in decision making. “Think about the kinds of problems Elon Musk is trying to solve with SpaceX and Tesla?” he said. “They involve long timescales to reach fruition. You would not be successful if you thought purely in terms of quarterly results and targets. From the outset these opportunities require making both short-term and long-term decisions.”

Does your decision making consider different time horizons or is it too short term focused?

How does your decision-making need to evolve to help support creating a sustainable future for the planet and society? Over the last decade, more and more companies have become customer-centred. It can be argued that the idea of being customer-centric needs to be widened to include planet-centric and social-centric. If an activity does not tick the boxes on all of these dimensions, then should a company be doing it?

3. Focus on creating meaning rather than talking about purpose

Organisation purpose has grown in significance since the 90s, and in particular over the last 10 years across the spectrum of business, popularised by thinkers like Simon Sinek and his book “Start with Why”. Companies have invested heavily in defining their purpose and values - first to evolve their brands and their marketing, then to redefine culture, create internal clarity and reaffirm direction, and more recently to attract talent and reframe their impact. Stephen Kurgar, a new Partner at Index Ventures, predicts the pandemic will catalyse a shift from a decade of convenience to a decade of purpose. I agree, but the shift needs another ingredient.

Purpose is an intention. When you fulfil your purpose, you create meaning through impact. Meaning is a useful, but often missing sparring partner of purpose in business discussions. Talking about Meaning, as well as Purpose, can provide more direction because meaning is an outcome. It transcends intention to get at what actually happened, and its impact. What did x,y, z mean?

In short, I’m suggesting that Meaning helps make Purpose more useful, relatable, and actionable.

4. Redraw your company’s sphere of positive influence

Can you reframe or redraw your company’s sphere of influence in a more positive way? If you are replacing people with algorithms or robots, you are probably already trying to help them find alternative employment. Are you also investing some of your profits in supporting education that will shape your future employees? Or helping your employees spin-out new ventures in times of adversity, as Nokia did with its Bridge programme. Or helping people in the community start their own businesses so they can afford to buy the products and services you make? Such initiatives could fuel new types of value exchange and shift the role of big business, perhaps echoing history, where companies played a bigger role in society.

Could you reframe aspects of your operations to create positive impacts? For example, if you are a large corporate with multiple canteens, why not convert one of them to an incubator programme for food startups, where a rotating line-up of entrepreneurs can refine and launch their fledgling concepts? You would bring culinary variety and interest to your employees while helping someone start a business. Who knows, it might be the next Nando’s (Referring to Nando’s in an article on Philosophy. Check).

What other potential positive impacts could you unlock within your business model or operations?

5. Actively look for inspiration and counsel beyond your own borders

Actively seeking and engaging with examples of next generation businesses who are doing things differently out of your sector, will provide inspiration, energy, and opportunities to learn about new business philosophies. Diverse inspiration is especially useful when trying to break away from tried-and-tested approaches within industries.

Who are the companies whose philosophies combine commercial success with positive social and environmental impacts? What could you learn and apply within your own “universe”? Who are the companies that are navigating complex issues with grace and realism?

External inspiration can be distributed within a company in interesting ways that create engagement and energy. For instance, live panel discussions, online conferences, private podcasts, and co-creation sessions with interesting people and provocateurs.

6. See your partnerships through different optics than commercials

Is it time to rethink the philosophy behind your partnerships? Traditionally, partnerships were commercial or sales-driven. Over the decades, they have evolved to be so much more. As companies sought to lower operational costs through outsourcing, or work closer with suppliers, partnerships also became concerned with actual business delivery. In recent years, as services and products have become ever more complex and involve digital ecosystems, partnerships touch the

heart of what a product, or service, or customer experience is. For example using Spotify through your Sonos system.

Incumbent companies in all sectors have also had to implement partnerships around innovation with start-ups, accelerators, incubators, and academic institutions. Brand partnerships have become more creative as companies look for interesting collaborations that add vitality and tell stories rather than purely thinking about them as revenue generators. In short, partnerships in all their forms have become a key competence of contemporary business. Now they are evolving again.

To meet the challenges and create the opportunities that will shape their next era, companies will need new meaning-based partnerships: partnerships where companies come together to collaborate on mutually beneficial outcomes, which are not necessarily driven by “winning”, but concerned with delivering positive impact or simply collaborating to deliver better business as usual. These will become part of the fabric of business.

Are you thinking about partnerships in creative ways, beyond channel or commercial partnerships? What could more creative or different types of partnership do for your company, and for the world around you?

7. Explore the philosophical implications of machine decision-making

If you are working with machine learning and automated decision-making, this is not Sci-Fi. If machine learning and algorithms haven't affected your business already, they will soon. The question is how do you embed your company values and philosophy into your algorithms, and the algorithms of your partners?

Google and other companies have created teams looking at the ethics of AI, and to understand the potential for hidden bias, and other unintended consequences. But as I said at the top, your business philosophy is broader than morals and ethics, it is the basis on which decisions are made. Your philosophy needs to be successfully translated into your algorithms, as well as understood by your workforce. Including ongoing philosophical as well technical input will help establish frameworks and protocols that maximise the positive benefits of these exciting technologies.

8. Be radical. Hire people that can boost your philosophical capabilities

Are you being challenged and inspired on the tougher elements of how your business needs to evolve? Do your sources of internal and external counsel on strategy and decision-making include the right kind of philosophical and creative inputs to successfully adapt, and to pursue future opportunities?

Can these types of input be embedded into your strategic decision-making? In the same way that companies have had to seek new competencies and expertise around digital, the same now applies for philosophy in order to navigate a successful path to the future.

There are people advertising themselves as business philosophers. It is also possible to augment boards, committees, and leadership teams with new types of people and perspectives by drawing from academics, consultants, researchers, and thought leaders from specialist areas, and those with more generalist expertise. You could also consider hiring a Chief Philosopher, or Philosopher in Residence. It is also possible that these people and skills already exist in

your organisation but the conditions for them to make an impact do not. Hence, the last provocation...

9. Create the supporting culture that enables philosophical capabilities to flourish

The thrust of this paper is that philosophical capabilities will help evolve the basis on which organisations make decisions. These capabilities involve asking the tough questions, creating the space for frank discussions and nurturing the critical thinking and enquiry to navigate complex issues. As Eva Appelbaum put it to me, without a culture that supports and nurtures these activities, philosophical advisers, be they internal or external, will find it hard to succeed. Perhaps more importantly, philosophical capabilities will not flourish across the organisation. The supporting cultural conditions are as important as the expertise.

Does your current organisational culture create the necessary space and conditions for critical thinking and philosophical enquiry?

Inspiration is everywhere

The future holds so much to be excited and positive about. There are numerous fantastic sources of practical inspiration and businesses doing things differently. Take for example companies that are choosing to become B-Corporations: there are currently 2500 in 50 countries around the world. There are many tech start-ups — like Sustainbill and Minespider — enabling companies and consumers to understand the environmental and social impact of the products they buy. Or World Wide Generation's GI7Eco Platform that aims to help deliver the UN's sustainability goals. Or Arrival, the electric vehicle company who has a strategy of using localised micro-factories "deployable worldwide to serve local

communities, pay local taxes and support retention of local talent". Or the plummeting cost of renewable energy. Positive, exciting, and optimistic things are happening everywhere. They are testament to the ingenuity of the human spirit, and provide practical solutions and clues to build a wonderful future.

Philosophical superpowers

Making difficult decisions is nothing new to the boardroom. For many companies, profit (or shareholder value) remains the north star. Other companies are born with a mission — a social cause — that sets direction and settles any philosophical dispute about "is this us?" Irrespective of a company's genesis, the number and nature of the questions we all face, are changing. In addition to Design, Digital and Data, there is a new skill set required in a world fraught with emergent philosophical barriers.

Technological progress and innovation, on their own, are not enough to solve challenges like climate change and inequality. Sustainable solutions require philosophical intelligence alongside technological muscle, just as technological progress itself will require philosophical solutions. They must go hand in hand if we want to shun the idea of blindly stumbling into the future, hoping for the best. Innovation and technological progress will be increasingly limited without major growth in our philosophical capabilities, and a major shift in the way decisions are made.

Disruptive innovation has changed the nature of the CEO role to one that needs to drive change, creativity, and agility. Philosophy is set to be the new skill set for companies and their CEOs and Boards. In the decade ahead of us, leading companies will start building philosophical capabilities, and seeking new types of advisory to augment their decision-making, in order to navigate a growing number of increasingly complex questions required to successfully evolve. Some may

even hire a Chief Philosopher.

Philosophy maybe the wrong term for the kind of capabilities I am advocating here. It is one certainly loaded with clichés — a philosopher ponders decisions but makes none. Looking past the terminology, the critical components here are the kinds of questions that are being asked, the basis on which decisions are made and the beliefs that underpin those decisions. These capabilities apply to everyday decision-making as well as to the ones that shape our future. To meet the challenges we face and realise a bright, sustainable future we need to ask the tough questions and, crucially, make decisions on a different basis to enact change. Different decisions and choices will emerge from new philosophies. Only then can we steer towards a new future rather than continuing on the same path. The alternative is to wait until circumstances impose reactive change — a scenario in which we will almost certainly have more limited options. Bring on the philosophers.

Lee Sankey
Founder, Door

Get in touch

If this essay has sparked your interest in exploring a project or initiative, we would be delighted to discuss working together. For instance, developing your evolution strategy, revisiting your company mission and decision-making frameworks, exploring new business models, your partnership strategy or creating the next generation of your products and services.

If you are interested in, or already working in what I am clumsily labelling business philosophy, it would be great to hear your thoughts on this essay.

contact@doorglobal.com

Thank you

I am grateful for the help of Julian Hirst, Margie Goldsmith, Ben Sales and Margot Noel. Their smart inputs and edits were instrumental.